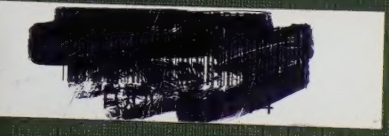

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Michael Angelo
and Other Sketches

MICHAEL ANGELO
AND OTHER SKETCHES

By
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"THE LIFE OF NAPOLEON," ETC.

Translated from the Russian
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41320
NEW YORK
E. P. DUTTON & CO., INC.
9/35

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FIRST EDITION

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MICHAEL ANGELO

An Historical Study

I

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IN THE spring of 1506 half of the square in front of the ancient cathedral of St. Peter in Rome was covered with huge blocks of Carrara marble: they sparkled in the sun like white heaps of freshly fallen snow with blue shadows upon it. Each day new barges loaded with marble came by sea to Ostia and then up the Tiber to the wharf in Rome. The blocks were unloaded and piled up as far as the church of St. Catherine and between the church and the narrow passage that leads from the Vatican palace to the fortress of St. Angelus. The creaking of heavy carts drawn by bulls and oxen, the shouts of the drivers and the stone masons' mallets were heard from morning till night.

The Romans who have always been notorious for their love of sightseeing crowded to Borgo to admire these wonderful preparations. Various

rumours were about in the city but one thing was certain: the new Pope Julius II had commissioned the Florentine sculptor and architect Michael Angelo Buonarotti to make a huge sarcophagus such as neither the emperors nor the heroes of antiquity had ever had.

There was to be a mausoleum of three storeys surrounded by caryatides, allegorical figures of all the arts and sciences, marble colossi and titans, among which a gigantic long-bearded Moses was to be seated, looking like a monstrous two-horned demon ready in his anger to break the Tablets of the Law. Above the mausoleum there were to be two huge statues, one of Cybele, the goddess of earth, weeping over the Pope's death, and Urania, the goddess of the sky, rejoicing at his entering a better world: they were to support Julius's coffin. Pious people thought it was a blasphemous idea that two heathen goddesses should bear in their arms the sarcophagus of the Vicar of Christ, the servitor of the God Who chose to be born like a beggar on straw in the shepherds' cave so as to preach to men

the love of poverty. The old cathedral of St. Peter, the ancient sanctuary of the Christian world, proved to be too small for the proud mausoleum: Julius decided to build a new one, more spacious and luxurious, and did not hesitate to destroy the thousand-year old walls of the temple built at the time of Constantine the Great. He entrusted the work to Bramante from Ubrino, his favourite, who had been architect at the court of the Duke Lodovico Moro and was a clever obsequious man, ready to do any master's bidding.

When an old peasant from the Campagna who had not been to Rome for some years went into St. Peter's church to pray and saw the destruction and desecration of the ancient shrine he could not refrain from tears. Clouds of dust rose among the wooden scaffolding. Fragments of porphyry columns were thrown on to the heaps of mortar, rubbish and brick; the ancient tombs of early Christian bishops had been opened and the dust of their bones scattered in the wind; mosaics at which generations of skilled

craftsmen had worked were being smashed, and it was pitiful to see their fragile, precious surface crumble under the masons' mallets. Bramante had no pity upon anything and no scruples. New men were laying the foundations of the new temple.

Anxious to please his headstrong master the architect made the workmen prepare mortar and bricks and cover pieces of travertin with cement at night by torchlight so that in the day time Julius should see walls rising out of the earth as though by magic: the miraculous architect cared little about the stability of the work so long as he could delude the Pope's impatience.

Julius hurried the sculptor no less than he did the architect. The townspeople pointed out to one another the drawbridge beyond the church of St. Catherine that joined a wing of the Vatican with Michael Angelo's house and studio. Julius could visit the sculptor at any hour of the day or the night, unseen by anyone, talk to him without witnesses and watch the progress of his work. Prelates and Cardinals envied the newcomer, a

Florentine "upstart," a mason to whom the Pontiff showed such favour.

But was it likely to last? Michael Angelo had dangerous enemies: the cunning Bramante whispered evil things into the Pope's ears, trying to make him lose interest in the mausoleum. He succeeded in depriving of any share in the building of the cathedral Giuliano da San Gallo who had called Buonarotti to the Papal Court; now it was Michael Angelo's turn.

II

Early in April, on one of those still sunny mornings in Rome when the town smells of the freshness of the surrounding fields, and the ringing of bells rises up to heaven like a song, two masons were talking as they sat at their work among white blocks of marble. One was an old man called Grillo from a small town, Lavagna, north of Carrara in the province of Genoa, where Michael Angelo had hired boat-

men for bringing the stone to Rome, and the other a young man called Cioppoli, a mason from Settignano, a suburb of Florence.

"Well, what was Mona Pipa's wine like?" asked Grillo, hammering away and screwing up his red eyelids on account of the glare and marble dust.

"To tell the truth it was sour. Mona Pipa is as much of a rogue as all these tavern keepers. But she gave us some kind of salt fish that made us desperately thirsty—we could have drunk a monastery cellar dry, and so any wine seemed good. We got thoroughly drunk yesterday—I still have a splitting headache. That rascal Ambrogio had to be dragged from under the bench by his feet. We had a jolly time. Come to Mona Pipa's to-night, mate. You'll like it."

"Ah, it's not for an old man like me," said Grillo, with a heavy sigh. "You are young and single, and your heart is light, but I have no end of worries. I have a wife at home and two daughters old enough to be married. They may have died of hunger without me, or gone beg-

ging, or, God forbid, done something worse. It doesn't take much to get young girls into trouble. I wish I could make haste and go home. What are they keeping us here for? If they would only pay our wages——"

"No, my dear fellow, it will be a long time before you get your wages. The master has very little money now and heaven only knows when he will have any."

A look of dismay came into Grillo's face, small, sunburnt and wrinkled like a baked apple; his reddened eyelids blinked helplessly.

"What are you saying, Cioppoli! St. George save us from such a misfortune! We are poor men, we are working by contract. Messer Michael Angelo is a kind and honourable gentleman, he won't cheat us."

"He wouldn't cheat us, but he has been cheated himself, and you know, Grillo, there is no redress against the Pope, it's no use complaining."

"But the Pope likes the master; I have heard he gave him a thousand scudi in advance."

"What has been given has been spent and he isn't giving any more."

"But what has happened, Cioppoli? Tell me, you know what's going on better than I do."

"Things have gone wrong, Grillo; the Pope is set against Michael Angelo."

"Who made trouble between them?"

"Bramante, the architect of the cathedral. You know that grand gentleman, fat and bald —he rides a white mule in silk harness and tips one well—never gives less than a soldi."

"I know, he threw me a silver coin the other day because I bowed low to him."

"That's the one. You see, he is a clever rogue. He would make one believe that the moon is made of cream cheese. And it's he who is trying to ruin our master."

"But what does he dislike him for?"

Cioppoli stopped hammering for a minute and with a mysterious air bent to his comrade's ear:

"He dislikes him, mate, because it's all a very crooked business. Bramante knows what's what. He is a liberal and magnificent gentleman. He

gives dinners grand enough for a duke. He is always in desperate straits for cash. He is in debt to the Jews all round, but he lives as though he were made of money. He deceives the Pope and ruins the State. His buildings are insecure, they say the walls will crack in ten years' time. The Pope is delighted with him because he builds so quickly, but it's poor work, all built on sand. And Messer Michael Angelo sees right through him and knows all his wiles. Michael Angelo is an upright and truthful man, and Bramante is afraid he might show up his tricks and so he tells tales against him. He told the Pope it's a bad omen to build oneself a mausoleum in one's life-time: it's hastening one's death. The Pope was frightened, grew tired of the mausoleum and stopped giving money. Masons and boatmen have been hired, heaps of marble bought, but who is to pay the piper heaven only knows . . . I am afraid it will be a long time before you go back to Lavagna, Grillo."

"Hush, Cioppoli, here's the master."

And they began hammering zealously.

III

A morose and ugly man, dressed in dusty old black velvet, was approaching them followed by a crowd of contractors, carpenters, bargemen and masons, who were arguing, shouting, accosting him with bills, swearing, protesting and clamouring for money.

"You may say what you like, Messer," the chief contractor was saying, "but we cannot wait any longer. We took the job like honest people. Please discharge us."

"If His Holiness—" the man besieged by the crowd tried to protest.

"We haven't come to His Holiness but to you, Messer."

"I promise you——"

"One can't live on promises. We have come for money, not for promises. Do you want us to starve?"

"Don't be hard on us, Signor," pitiful voices begged. "We have served you in all conscience, have pity on us, let us go in peace."

"Listen, this is my last word and I won't go back on it. Wait till to-morrow. I will go to the Pope for the last time, and if he doesn't pay I will pay every soldi I owe you out of my own money. Don't be afraid, I won't play you false. I hired you and I shall pay, if I have to mortgage my soul and body to the devil."

With these words he turned round and walked home, along a narrow path between blocks of marble. The ground was strewn with white chips that crunched under one's feet like hard snow on a frosty day.

He was over thirty, of less than medium height, bony and strongly built. His head seemed huge, the scanty hair and beard were black and coarse, the lower lip protruded with an expression of sullen haughtiness; there were lines of bitterness and suffering round the badly shaped mouth; the small grey eyes, cold as lead, were placed wide apart under the scanty eyebrows and their heavy and suspicious stare seemed to repulse those who were speaking to him. The misshapen nose made the face particularly ugly.

In Florence when he was still a boy he had provoked by his jibes a fight with the painter Torrigiani, a brutal, fierce man, who smashed Buonarotti's nose with his fist. Michael Angelo was disfigured for life; he knew it and it made him wretched.

He walked to the house behind St. Catherine's church and knocked. An old servant with her sleeves rolled up and her skirt tucked up opened the door to him.

"Has the messenger from the treasury been here?" he asked the old woman.

"No, he hasn't. Muleteers came to ask for money, they were swearing and shouting, I could hardly get rid of them."

There was a smell of burnt olive oil in the house: dinner was being cooked for a crowd of workmen, carpenters and masons who had been hired in Florence. As he walked to his studio, he glanced with boredom and disgust into a big room taken up with the beds, the crockery, the instruments and other belongings of the workmen who lived in the house. Now all these

men were left on his hands, and he did not know what to do with them.

It was light and still in the studio. He sighed with relief, feeling the familiar pleasant smell of damp clay and marble dust. Behind wooden scaffolding rough white blocks hardly touched with the chisel could be seen, but the sculptor's eye could already detect the images hidden within them. He took up the mallet and the chisel and made a few strokes.

He could not forget himself in work—there was no peace in his heart. He came down from the scaffolding and going up to the table, began looking at the drawings and plans of the unlucky mausoleum which were now useless and unmeaning. He found among them a fine blue sheet of paper: it was a love poem to the only woman who had all her life been as faithful to another man as he had been to her. A naïve and sentimental inscription, that might have been made by a lovesick boy, said in the margin *"Delle cose divine se ne parla in campo azzuro*

—one should write of divine things upon sky-blue paper."

Dear pitiful rhymes lost among the dull accounts of the carpenters and boatmen! A smile lit up for a moment his morose disfigured face.

He looked out of the window and from the familiar shadow that fell from the house next door into the street knew that it was past midday. He had to go to the Palace at once, the Pope finished his dinner at that time and one could be certain of finding him at home. He looked at his old and dusty clothes, threadbare at the elbows and dirtied by work; a button in front was hanging by one thread—the servant kept forgetting to sew it on. People thought him haughty and contemptuous, but in truth the merest trifle was enough to make him blush and fly into confusion like a schoolboy. He recalled with bitterness that only a short time ago the Pope had come to his studio to talk to him as a friend—his everyday clothes gave no offence then. He felt vexed and disgusted at the thought of taking out of the wardrobe his only court dress of

blue silk with a rich pattern on it. Hastily collecting the necessary plans and accounts, he went to the palace as he was, in his old clothes, cross and gloomy in anticipation of what awaited him.

Not far from the *belvedere* on the gay wide staircase that had just been built, magnificently and insecurely by the Pope's favourite, Bramante, he met the architect, surrounded by a crowd of friends and flatterers. Bramante was returning from the Pope in excellent spirits, having been well received and probably given a large sum of money. A page, slim and graceful as a young girl, was carrying behind him big rolls of plans and drawings. The architect was dressed like a courtier and behaved like one. A self-confident and almost youthful bearing, intelligent and lively eyes, soft grey hair that framed a broad bare skull that might have belonged to Pythagoras or Archimedes, magnificent clothes that fell in graceful folds—all gave the handsome old man an expression of benign and imposing dignity. He was talking to a young

Bishop about a beautiful new mare, the envy of all Roman horsemen, that he had just bought from a Turkish horse-dealer. Then he turned to his friends and invited them to supper.

"I have just received some partridges from Mugello, and you shall taste our good Lombardian wine, Montebrantino, it is equal to the best Corsican——"

Bramante saw Buonarotti walking up the stairs. The old man took off his biretta and bowed with refined, slightly exaggerated politeness to his young rival who answered with a cold restrained bow.

Michael Angelo walked along the endless corridors and galleries of the Vatican that were being rebuilt; he could not help admiring his rival's work, light as a lovely dream, graceful and unstable: Buonarotti foresaw that in another twenty years these walls would crumble if they were not reinforced. There was the damp smell of fresh plaster; wooden scaffolding could be seen everywhere.

He came up to a door guarded by a Swiss

soldier with a spear and an arbalest. The man looked intently into Buonarotti's face, evidently not recognising him, then apologised and let him through.

IV

Michael Angelo entered the big, half-dark chamber that the Pope used as a dining-room; the vaulted ceiling glistened with the old gold of Giotto's frescoes. The walls were hung with precious Flemish carpets of dull, tender, soft tints picturing pagan myths—the rape of Europa, the death of Adonis. Round the walls there were benches, with tall carved backs of dark wood.

The Pope had finished his dinner and was attending to business. His secretary was reading despatches from Bologna. All was still. Cardinals and a few courtiers seated at the table spoke in whispers. There was a subtle smell of dinner spices in the close air. The servants coming and going at a sign from the Master of the

Ceremonies glided noiselessly like shadows. The court physician holding a bottle of medicine was carefully counting the drops into a glass of wine set aside for the Pope. A strange youth of extraordinary beauty, something between a buffoon and a courtier, in half-feminine, half-childish attire, with long, fair curls and sly, beautiful eyes that shone with languor was sitting on a silk gold-embroidered cushion at the very feet of His Holiness. He was touching the strings of a lute, lightly and delicately so as not to disturb the reading. This was the all-powerful, spoiled darling of the formidable Julius, the seventeen-year-old Ganymede of the Vatican Jupiter, the illustrious gentleman of the bedchamber, Accorsio, who had the keys of the Pope's heart, as the Pope had the keys of heaven.

A ray of sunlight glided over the table, shone in the crystal cup of wine, played on a majolica dish, caught the silvery white beard of the Pope that stood out against the dark red velvet of the wide papal stole and sparkled in the big ruby on the old man's pale emaciated hand. He sat

bending slightly and leaning both elbows on the arms of the chair pushed away from the table. His bare skull was covered with a velvet cap of the same dark red colour as the stole. Vice and disease had left their trace on the worn-out face with its sunken cheeks. But the thin lips were set with an expression of imperious and indomitable determination and the bright eyes, set in deep hollows under the frowning eyebrows, reflected a will that neither vice nor disease could conquer. Their look was terrible when they glittered with anger.

Michael Angelo came into the dining-room. The secretary had finished reading the Bologna despatches. Julius noticed Buonarotti and glanced at him from under his eyebrows with a bored and ill-humoured expression. The sculptor understood he had come at the wrong moment; without speaking to anyone he stopped by the window looking haughty and isolated and waited his turn like an ordinary petitioner.

The court jeweller, a fat old man with dirty hands, chatty, lively and round as a ball, came

up to the Pope. He spoke of buying precious stones to adorn the cross that Julius had recently ordered for the Sistine chapel altar. Not listening, the Pope closed his weary eyes. The jeweller ceased speaking, thinking that the Pope had gone to sleep. Then Julius opened his eyes and asked crossly:

"Have you any money left?"

"No, Your Holiness, I have spent all that has been allotted to me. I venture to ask Your Holiness to give me some more: Jem, the Armenian, offers two rubies and an emerald very cheap if Your Holiness . . ."

"That will do," said the Pope, with an impatient wave of his hand, "that's enough, I tell you, leave me alone."

The jeweller shifted his feet and was about to reply but the Pope shouted:

"Go to the devil and remember that I shan't give another penny either for small or big stones!"

Michael Angelo understood what the 'big stones' meant: the hint was addressed to him.

When his turn came he approached Julius with plans, drawings and accounts. The Pope glanced at them with aversion.

"I haven't time," he said, moving in his chair. "Come on Monday."

"Holy Father," Michael Angelo answered calmly and deliberately, "will you please look through these accounts? The workmen are asking to be paid; it would be unfair to refuse them any longer. Tell your treasurer to pay the money, or I shall be forced to pay for the marble for your mausoleum out of my own means."

Julius looked at Michael Angelo intently, as though in surprise. The artist met his gaze without lowering his eyes.

Everyone waited in suspense. Accorsio left his lute and looked up roguishly, amused and curious.

Julius said nothing and merely brushed away the plans and accounts that had been placed before him so that they fell on the floor. Then paying no attention to Buonarotti and seemingly forgetting him, he got up from his chair; two

young prelates rushed up to support him by the arms, a third handed him his staff, and, leaning upon it, the Pope walked with quick, vigorous steps to the inner chambers for a short midday rest.

Buonarotti turned pale and his lips twitched with fury. Conscious of the mocking glances of the pages, lackeys and grooms, he had to bend down and pick up his papers from the floor.

V

He came home and at once wrote to his old friend, a Florentine like himself, Messer Baldasar Balducci, the manager of Galli's Roman bank, asking for a loan of two hundred gold ducats. He anxiously waited for a reply thinking bitterly of a possible refusal and fresh humiliations. But even if Balducci did as he asked him, Michael Angelo would be ruined: to repay the loan he would have to sell the house in Florence where his old father and brothers were living. He recalled the long years of priva-

tion he had suffered of his own choice in order to provide for his family, recalled the eight months he had just spent in the Carrara quarries. Malaria and exhausting work, in the burning sun and under icy rain, had very nearly undermined his strong constitution. During all that time he had two servants and one horse and received nothing from the Pope except his keep. He was not miserly but careful and practical like a true Florentine; he knew the value of money and denied himself a great deal, dreaming of future ease and independence. This was the way he had been brought up in a good honest family in which respect for one's own and other people's property was imbibed with the mother's milk.

At last the messenger came with an answer from the bank. In a short courteous note Baldasar Balducci promised to send the money on the following morning. Reassured, Michael Angelo mounted the scaffolding and took up the chisel once more.

Gradually he became absorbed in work. The

statue he was working at was one of the "Bound Slaves," personifications of the arts, which were to stand on the square projections of the mausoleum. They were to symbolise the fact that Julius's death put the arts in chains and deprived them of the hope of ever finding another such patron. The artist could not think of the allegory without a bitter smile. But what did it matter? Feeling that the mausoleum would never be finished, he worked for his own sake, disinterestedly, with no ulterior motive and not thinking about the Pope. He forgot everything. The strokes of the chisel were so powerful that one fancied the whole statue would be smashed. Chips of marble fell down like rain.

The servant came to call him to supper but he did not go; he merely took a slice of bread, ate it hastily without leaving the scaffolding and set to work again. The hard stone seemed to grow softer and softer, to melt like wax. The sculptor was liberating the hidden image from its stony sheath. The young slave had thrown back his

head in despair, straining every nerve, every muscle with the intense effort to break the bonds which were cutting into his flesh.

The artist left his work reluctantly when it had grown dark. He lit a lamp and sat till the small hours of the morning over his favourite book, the Divine Comedy, with which, as with his Bible, he never parted. That night he wrote a proud poem dedicated to Dante:

Dal mondo scese ai ciechi abissi
Pur fuss'io tal! ch'a simil sorte nato,
Per l'aspro esilio con la virtute
Darei del mondo il piu felice stato.

The night was beginning to pale when Michael Angelo lay down on his poor hard bed for a short rest, as he often did, almost without undressing or taking off his shoes.

In the morning he called the boatmen, the masons, and the carpenters and paid everything he owed them down to the last soldi.

VI

On the day appointed by Julius, that is, on Monday, he went to the Palace again. He was told that the Pope was going hunting in the Albanian Mountains. The yard was full of the gay sounds of horns and the barking of dogs, the shouts of the huntsmen, the noise and flutter of falcons' wings. From a distance Michael Angelo saw Julius looking like an old General in his hunting attire that seemed strange on an ecclesiastic—big boots, a hat with feathers and a leather jerkin; he mounted a beautiful horse while Accorsio held the stirrup. The Pope was animated and whispered something to his favourite who smiled subtly and ambiguously like a woman. Buonarotti understood that the Pope had no thoughts to spare for the mausoleum. He came again on Tuesday, the Pope had not yet returned from hunting. He came on Wednesday and met in the gallery a secretary he knew who warned him that His Holiness was in bad spirits because of serious news from Bologna; he had

just beaten the bishop of Ancona with his staff. Courtiers, with startled faces, came out of the reception room and Michael Angelo heard the French Ambassador say with a smile to a fat, sleek and serene-looking chaplain:

"*Mais il est terriblement cholerique, votre Pape!*"

Buonarotti still hoped that if the Pope were reminded about the accounts he would pay, however reluctantly. He determined at all costs to see the Pope the following day, Thursday.

But when he came up to the reception room door the Pope's groom—*palafreniere*—stopped him.

"Excuse me, Signor, I have orders not to admit your honour."

One of the Luccan bishops who happened to be in the hall heard these words and pulled him up sharply.

"How dare you, you ruffian! I suppose you don't know to whom you are talking. This is Messer Buonarotti. He is to be admitted at all hours."

"You are mistaken, Signor," the *palafreniere* answered calmly. "I know Messer Buonarotti very well, but it is my duty to carry out the orders of the Pope and of my superiors without arguing."

Michael Angelo could not believe his ears. It all seemed like a bad dream. He turned without a word, came home and wrote the following note to the Pope.

"Blessed Father, to-day I was driven out of the palace by your orders and so I inform you that henceforth if you wish to see me, you will have to look for me in another place than Rome."

He sent this letter to the *cameriere* Agostino Scalco to be given to the Pope.

Calling two faithful servants who had been with him for years and acted as foremen over the workmen, Cosimo the carpenter, and Antonio the mason, he said to them:

"Go and find some Jew to whom you can sell all there is in this house and then come and join me in Florence."

Then he went to the "Three Moors" inn where the post stopped, booked a seat in the clumsy and uncomfortable post-chaise driven by four wretched nags and two hours later left Rome for the North. His fellow-travellers were a morose and taciturn chemist from Perugia, an old Jewish money-lender with the face of an Old Testament patriarch, a gay and lively Certosian monk who kept persuading the Jew to be baptised, and a stout fair-skinned farmer's wife with a basket of eggs and a number of parcels, who was very much afraid of brigands or Turks attacking the chaise. Michael Angelo was glad that no one recognised him, but he felt uneasy and was only reassured when they had left Rome several miles behind them. All around as far as the eye could see, up to the amphitheatre of the Sabine Mountains with the menacing steep cliff of Rocca-di-Papa, the greenish-blue hills of the Campagna rose and fell in gentle slopes like the waves of a shadowy sea. In places a watch tower of the rebellious feudal

barons of the Holy See—the Colonnas, the Orsinis, the Savellis—showed dark against the clear sky. Black noisy flocks of crows and jackdaws circled over the slumbering ruins and the broken arches of the aqueducts.

Enjoying the stillness and his freedom Michael Angelo breathed in with delight the scent of the wild flowers, sweet as honey and strong as wine. All that had happened to him in the service of the Pope now seemed to him a far-off memory.

The road slowly rose uphill. He was admiring the clouds on the horizon. From a child he had loved to discover in these white masses hidden images—statues, as it were, modelled by an unknown sculptor, surpassing in grandeur all that a man could do. He remembered how once looking down upon the Carrara quarries from a high cliff near the sea he had planned to make a huge statue in the rock so that the ships could sight it from a great distance. It was an artist's dream, as purposeless as the fleeting, monstrous and seductive outlines of the towering clouds.

VII

It was night when the post-chaise rattled along the badly paved narrow streets of a small town, the old fortress of Pogibonci, the first town on the Florentine territory within eighteen or twenty miles of Florence. Michael Angelo decided to stay here for the night thinking he was safe in a town belonging to Florence. The chief of the town, the *podesta*, was his friend Federigo Starno.

Buonarotti put up at a small inn with the signboard of a "Tin Dish" not far from the town hall. A fire was blazing in the huge vaulted kitchen, and customs officers and mercenaries from San Gemiriano were drinking, playing dice and singing. The host said that all the beds had been engaged by horse-dealers who were hastening to the fair at Siena and took the artist to a small stuffy room where three people were snoring loudly on an enormous bed that looked like a bier; he pointed out to Michael Angelo a free place on the edge of the bed and promised to

give him a separate pillow assuring him "that if they all lay a little closer together there would be plenty of room."

Buonarotti preferred to settle for the night on a broad wooden bench by the window, wrapping himself up in his travelling cloak and putting under his head by way of a pillow his leather bag of papers and drawings.

It was a long time since he had slept so sweetly as he did in that wretched inn on his first night of freedom in his native land.

The cocks had crowed, the stars were turning pale and the bells of St. Petronilla's chapel were ringing when there was loud knocking at the inn's gate, shouts, abuse, the tramp of horses' hoofs. Michael Angelo jumped up. It was some time before he could understand in the darkness where he was and what had happened to him. He had forgotten it all in his sleep and fancied he was still in Rome, in his bedroom next to the studio. Then he remembered and thought the drunken customs-officers were making an uproar in the kitchen. But the tramp of horses in the

next street soon made him guess that there was something wrong and that probably Julius's messengers had come for him. His heart beat faster: he knew that he might have to pay for his action with his life, or at any rate with imprisonment in the terrible subterranean dungeons of St. Angelus. He fumbled in the dark for his leather belt with a sheath attached to it, took out his dagger and put it by his side on the window sill.

The door opened and the host, sleepy and dishevelled, thrust his head in; he was carrying a lantern which threw a shifting circle of light on the brick floor.

"Are you Messer Michael Angelo Buonarotti from Rome?" he said.

"I am Buonarotti from Florence and am returning to my native city from Rome. What do you want?"

"Dear me, I had no idea, Excellenza!" the host cried with an obsequious bow. "Why hasn't your Excellency warned me? I know, I know, *incognito*. But, believe me, had I had the happi-

ness to suspect that such a noble and illustrious gentleman is honouring my humble dwelling I would have given him a room downstairs. It is true, we are expecting any hour the Ambassador of the republic, Messer Justiniani, but for your illustrious self we would . . ."

"I say, what do you want?" Michael Angelo repeated impatiently, hearing that the shouts and the knocking continued.

"Messengers from His Holiness, our most blessed and gracious father, Pope Julius," the landlord announced with a mysterious air as though it were a piece of unexpected and joyous news. "I let them in with your permission. They are very grand and very angry gentlemen, I venture to say, they had very nearly broken my gates and roused the whole town."

"You will do me a great service, my good man," Michael Angelo said, "if you send someone at once, or go yourself to my friend the podesta, Messer Federigo Starno. Ask him in my name to come here with his men: tell him I may soon need his help."

"Your Honour need not be anxious," the landlord replied, "I have just heard Messer Federigo's voice at my gate, and at night time he never goes out without an escort. But here are the messengers. . . ."

And he let into the room five men armed to the teeth, in huge riding boots bespattered with mud. The three men asleep in the huge bed awoke and jumped up: one of them thinking they were brigands hid under the bed, another crossed himself and whispered an *Ave Maria*, the third swore as he rubbed his eyes.

Michael Angelo recognised the leader of the small band, a young man with a handsome and cruel face: he was an officer of the Pope's guards. The young man took off his black red-plumed biretta and said, bowing politely:

"I have the honour to be your obedient servant, Messer Buonarotti. I am Knight Gismondo Brandino. I make bold to come to you with a message from the Pope. Will you do us the favour to follow us. The horses are at the gate.

We should not delay, for His Holiness is expecting you with great impatience."

"The Pope must have received by now my letter in which I tell him that I have left Rome for good and do not intend to return there," Michael Angelo replied.

"I have a letter from His Holiness."

Gismondo drew nearer and handed him a letter that had attached to it by a string a big seal of green wax, with the design of the papal tiara and keys. The landlord brought a tallow candle in a clumsy wooden candlestick. Michael Angelo read the following words written in the Pope's hand:

"On reading this return to Rome immediately, or be prepared to meet our wrath.

Julius"

"This letter," the artist said calmly, "makes no difference whatever. You can tell His Holiness that I am not going to change my mind and return to Rome."

"Messer," Gismondo said, "I speak now not as a messenger of His Holiness but as one who

wishes well to a great artist, the pride and glory of our country: do the Pope's will. The Holy Father is angry but he is ready to forgive you and to show more favour to you than before. I know that he has paid the two hundred ducats you had borrowed from Galli's bank last Saturday."

"Thank you for your good advice, Sir Knight," Buonarotti replied with a laugh, "but unfortunately you have to do with a man quite as obstinate and self-willed as His Holiness, the Pope Julius. I don't change my mind any more than the Pope does and I will have nothing more to do with him."

"Messer Buonarotti, much as it grieves me, I must warn you that if you don't wish to return of your own will, I am at liberty to use extreme measures, I hope you will not drive me to it. . . ."

"A threat!" Michael Angelo interrupted and rapidly turning to the window opened the shutter, lifted the movable frame with opaque glass

and saw at the inn's gate Federigo Starno with an armed escort and a crowd of sightseers.

The morning sky was growing light, the high pitched bells of St. Petronilla's rang merrily.

"Messer Buonarotti, I ask for the last time, will you follow us?" Gismondo asked.

"Leave me in peace. I assure you it is best for us both."

"In that case . . ."

At a sign from Gismondo one of the soldiers went up to Michael Angelo and took him by the hand. He understood they were going to bind him and pushed the soldier away so violently that the man knocked himself against the wall and very nearly fell. At the same time Buonarotti seize his dagger and looking out of the window welcomed his friend the podesta in a loud voice:

"Good morning, Messer Federigo! How are you? . . . No, no, thank you, I don't need your help as yet." Then turning to the Pope's messenger he continued:

"Listen, Messer: if one of your men lays a

finger on me I will call in the podesta's guards and it will go badly with you. At the least sign from me the men at the gates will hack you to pieces. We are in a free country here. I am a citizen of the Florentine republic and woe to him who dares lay hands on me. I don't want bloodshed. Go in peace before there is any trouble."

Gismondo understood that Michael Angelo was not joking, his expression changed and he began in a different tone asking the artist at any rate to answer the Pope's letter.

Buonarotti agreed, and telling the landlord to bring some ink, wrote a short letter saying that the messengers had found him on Florentine territory and so could not force him to go to Rome, that he would not return on any account, that the Pope ought not to have let him be insulted and driven out like a rascal in return for faithful service and that since Julius would not let him finish the mausoleum he considered their contract at an end and did not wish to make a new one.

Dating the letter he sealed it and handed it to

Gismondo. The knight bowed with Spanish ceremonious politeness, saying, "I hope we shall soon meet again in Rome," and as there was nothing further to do he and his men went out. In a few minutes Buonarotti heard the sound of horses' hoofs growing fainter and fainter.

That same day among the lovely, gently sloping hills, where the Arno winds its silver coils he saw the tiled reddish roof of Maria del Fiore that looks like a huge unopened flower and the tall dark tower of the Palazzo della Signoria.

At that time Pietro Soderini, an old friend of Michael Angelo, was the ruler of Florence, its permanent *Gonfaloniere*. He took the artist under his protection.

Three months later a Papal Bull came from Rome. "Beloved Children!" Julius wrote to the noblemen of Florence, "in the first place we send you our apostolic blessing for the benefit and salvation of your souls and bodies. We hear that Michael Angelo, the sculptor, who has thoughtlessly and inconsiderately left us, does not dare to return. We are not wroth with him, knowing

the nature and character of people like him. But to make him lay aside all suspicion we remind you of your duty of filial obedience and charge you to tell him that should he wish to return we should do him no harm but should receive him with the same favour as we have shown him before his departure. Given in Rome on July 8th, 1506, in the third year of our rule."

Michael Angelo knew very well that these generous promises were not to be trusted, that the Holy Father would not hesitate to break his word, that he had done so more than once in dealing with people of more consequence than an artist and that the gracious Bill was only a diplomatic ruse and a snare.

Soderini answered Julius respectfully and evasively. He said that Michael Angelo was so intimidated (*impaurito*) that in spite of the Pope's assurances he did not think it safe to return to Rome; Soderini was doing his best to persuade him to do so, but was convinced that if he failed in kindness and consideration to Michael Angelo the latter would be certain to

run away, as he had very nearly done on two occasions.

The Gonfaloniere did not take much notice of the first Bull nor hurry Michael Angelo, hoping that Julius's anger would soon cool down.

A few days later another Bull came, still more insistent and gracious.

Then Soderini who was an irreproachably honest but weak and irresolute man called Michael Angelo and said to him:

"You have treated the Pope in a way that the King of France would not dare to treat him. Don't kick against the pricks. You'be been obstinate enough. We don't want to begin a war with His Holiness for your sake and to put the city in danger and we cannot do so, and we beg you to return to him."

"I would rather go to the Great Turk than to His Holiness," Buonarotti cried. "The Sultan will know how to defend me against the Pope."

Soderini knew that these words were no empty threat. The artist had long been negotiating with Bajazet II through a Franciscan monk who

had come from Constantinople. Feeling like a wild beast tracked down to its lair, Buonarotti was ready to do anything to escape the terrible clutches of the Pope. The Sultan was offering him the work of building a bridge across one of the arms of the Golden Horn so as to join Constantinople to Pera. The grandeur of the scheme appealed to the artist.

From Soderini he went to Fra Timoteo, the Franciscan monk with whom he was negotiating.

The monk received him joyfully as usual, offered him some oriental preserve of roses and showing new letters from Constantinople begged him to decide as soon as possible, because the Sultan did not want to wait any longer and asked for a final answer.

"Fra Timoteo," Michael Angelo said, "tell me the truth as before God: will the Sultan want me to renounce Christ and worship the impious Mahomet? I would rather die than even think of such a thing, let alone do it."

"Oh, don't be uneasy, Messer Buonarotti, I swear to you by the Holy Easter and the salva-

tion of my soul that the Sultan will not require of you anything contrary to your conscience. Believe me, God's judgment is different from men's. I have lived in Constantinople and I have lived in Rome, and I tell you honestly I should find it hard to say where there is more wickedness—at the court of His Holiness or of His Majesty. Messer Buonarotti, we are all men, we are all human. I have known heathens who were more righteous and merciful than those who call themselves Christians and say with their lips 'Lord, Lord' while the devil is in their hearts."

"Shall I be free, Fra Timoteo, free in everything? Will the Sultan let me do what I want in art?"

"Listen, my son, I read once, I don't remember where, that an ancient sculptor had planned to hew out of a big mountain by the sea a statue of Alexander the Great, so big that a town with all its streets, temples, market places and tens of thousands of people could be placed on the palm of each hand. If you conceived some such plan

—and I know that your great mind is capable of even grander schemes—the Sultan would understand you and refuse you nothing, neither men nor money. He is all powerful and wants you to create something worthy of you and of himself, something wonderful that no one in the whole world has dared to think of. The Sultan is stronger than the Pope, and by comparison with what he expects of you, the plans of His Holiness are nothing. The Pope has Bramante, that's enough for him. He doesn't deserve anyone better. If I were you I would show the Florentine shopkeepers and the Roman priests what they had lost! Oh, I would give them a lesson! I would go to the Sultan, if only to make them remember what it means to insult an artist. I could die of laughter when I think what a face the Pope will pull when he hears that you have gone to the Sultan. The Holy Father will simply bite his hands with anger. But it is too late—the bird has flown and there is no bringing it back. . . . And so it's settled, Messer Buonarotti, isn't it? I wouldn't advise

you anything bad. In two days we are leaving here and then going by boat from Venice. If you only say 'yes' I will write to His Majesty to-day."

VIII

Michael Angelo walked back from Fra Timoteo's through the quiet streets of Florence, plunged in deep thought. For the hundredth time he weighed in his mind the Pope against the Turk. Which was better, the Pope or the Turk?

"Oh heavens, is there really no freedom in the world, is there no place where I could serve no one, neither Pope nor Turk but do the bidding of my own heart and of God?"

With a heavy sigh he raised his eyes to heaven. Small round clouds, inaccessibly high in the sky were of an opalescent blue in the light of an invisible moon: there was everlasting cold, peace and freedom up there.

"The Pope or the Turk," he repeated with a

bitter smile, "the monk is right, one is as bad as the other. What does it matter? There is no freedom, one has to be a slave, to suffer and submit."

He recalled how haughty and fearless he had been at Poggibonsi. Three months of petty insults, of petty encounters with life were enough to disarm him, to drain his soul of every drop of pride. He felt weak and helpless. Much good it was to have rebelled and run away from Rome, just to make himself ridiculous!

He hurried home, undressed without lighting a candle and went to bed, wrapping himself up in his blanket, so as not to see or hear anything. "I am weary, weary," he kept repeating. A shiver of disgust for life, for men, for himself, pierced him to the heart, like the chill of a deadly sickness. Utterly crushed and exhausted, with no thought or feeling or will, he dropped into a heavy sleep.

In the morning a third Bull came.

Soderini was told of Buonarotti's negotiations with the Turk. He summoned the artist once

more and assured him that if he went to the Sultan, Julius would be sure to excommunicate him; it was better to die at the Pope's hand than to live at the court of the Turk. But Michael Angelo had nothing to fear; the Holy Father was well disposed towards him and wanted him back because he was fond of him and not in order to injure him. But if he still felt nervous the Florentine Signoria was ready to give him the title of Ambassador which would make his person inviolable.

Michael Angelo answered that he agreed to everything and was ready to go to the Pope.

Meanwhile His Holiness, acting not as a humble shepherd of Christ's sheep, but as a Roman General, in helmet and armour, spent his days on horseback, devastating the castles, towns and villages of the rebellious vassals and barons of the Church; he conquered Perugia and entered Bologna in triumph, cheered by the crowds.

Michael Angelo arrived there on November

15, 1506, with the title of Ambassador of the Florentine Republic.

The Gonfaloniere had given him a letter to his brother, Cardinal Soderini. "I venture to assure you," he wrote among other things, "that Michael Angelo is a remarkable man, the best sculptor in Italy, if not in the whole world. We entrust him to your care. By kindness and courtesy you can do anything with him. But he must be given to understand that he is loved and appreciated. Remember that Michael Angelo returns to the Pope trusting our word."

In spite of all the diplomatic courtesies Buonarotti was returning to the Pope "with a rope round his neck" as he said in one of his letters written at the time, that is, like a dog that is dragged by force.

He gave the letter to Cardinal Soderini who was ill and apologised for not being able to intercede for him personally; he asked one of his bishops to speak for the artist before the Pope.

Buonarotti arrived at Bologna in the morning

and went to hear Mass at the Cathedral. On the way back the Pope's equerries met him. They were delighted to see him and took him to the Palace.

IX

Surrounded by knights and generals the Pope sat in a gloomy and sumptuous hall in the *Palazzo de sedice* under a triumphal canopy of dark green velvet embroidered with oak leaves and acorns—the heraldic sign of Julius's family, della Rovere.

The bishop, the friend of Cardinal Soderini, met Buonarotti in the doorway, took him by the hand and began reassuring him:

"How do you feel, my son? The chief thing is, don't lose your presence of mind. God willing, all will be well—the Pope is in good spirits to-day. Don't be afraid, we'll do our best for you."

Michael Angelo glanced at the bishop. He

was a fidgetty man with an obsequious and mawkish expression.

"The chief thing is presence of mind," he repeated busily. "Fold your hands, look His Holiness straight in the eyes; His Holiness likes people to look him straight in the eyes. Assume a look of meekness and humility."

The bishop brought the artist up to the Pope's throne. Michael Angelo knelt down.

Julius glanced at him from under his eyebrows and immediately looked away again. The old man was clasping the ivory handle of his formidable ill-famed staff. At last Julius said morosely in a low voice:

In cambio di venir tu a trovar noi, tu hai aspettato che veniamo a trovar te? (Instead of coming to find us, you waited for us to come and find you?)

His Holiness meant by this that Bologna was nearer to Florence than to Rome so that it was he who had to come to find Michael Angelo at Bologna.

The artist said the words he had prepared

beforehand, politely excusing his action and protesting that he had no intention of offending His Holiness. He had ventured to leave Rome thinking that the Pope no longer needed him.

Julius made no answer and sat with bowed head. His face was angry, he was frowning and the corners of his tightly closed sunken mouth twitched convulsively. There was a silence.

The obsequious bishop decided it was time to intervene, or else things might end badly for Buonarotti. Amidst an ominous silence he said in a silly and pitiful voice:

"Please forgive the poor fellow, Your Holiness, don't be angry with him. All these artists are such queer people: it's no use expecting them to behave decently, they are ignorant, uncultured people who understand nothing but their trade."

"Fool!" the Pope shouted in such a voice that the bishop's legs gave way under him, "you insult him by what you say as I have never insulted him. It's you and not he who is ignorant. That man has more intelligence in his little

finger than you have in your whole head. Go to the devil!"

Then grooms, valets and courtiers surrounded the bishop, and pressing round him piloted him out of the room, at first gently, pushing him slightly by the elbows and then without any ceremony "shoving like flunkeys" in the words of Michael Angelo who often told the story to his friends in after years.

The Pope had vented his anger on the bishop. Everyone breathed more freely. Julius told Michael Angelo to come nearer and raising him graciously gave him his blessing.

"You queer man," the Pope said, and a smile played on his lips, "what were you afraid of? Did you think I would eat you?"

Then his face grew serious, he bent down and in a low voice said in Michael Angelo's ear so that the others could not hear:

"Don't believe slanderers, Buonarotti, any more than I believe them, and know that in all your life you will not find another man who would love you as much as I do."

Embracing Michael Angelo he kissed him on the forehead and they both felt that they understood each other.

X

Soon after that meeting the Pope, while still at Bologna, ordered the sculptor to make a huge portrait statue of himself, cast it in bronze and put it in a niche over the main entrance of the church of St. Petronius. He put a thousand scudi in Messer Antonio Maria Leniano's bank to meet the expenses. Buonarotti set to work zealously and the clay model of the statue was ready before Julius had left for Rome.

One day the Pope came into his studio to have a look at the work. The Holy Father was represented blessing the people with his right hand, but the artist did not know what to give him in the left.

"Would you like a book, Your Holiness?" he asked Julius. "A book!" the Pope exclaimed. "Oh no, I am not a man of learning. Not a book

but a sword. *Mettivi una spada, che io non so di lettere.*"

Then, pointing to the right arm of the statue raised with a powerful and a menacing gesture, the Pope asked with a smile:

"What is it? A blessing or a curse?"

"Your Holiness," Michael answered, "you are telling the people of Bologna that you will punish them if they are disobedient."

Buonarotti had sixteen months of hard work, privation and care while casting the statue. At last it was finished: a Pope of bronze, the image of his living self, was sitting over the church doors, his right arm raised menacingly, but in his left hand he had neither a book nor a sword, but the keys of St. Peter.

This statue has perished without a trace. The people of Bologna who had once met the triumphant Julius with shouts of joy hauled his statue down into the square with furious jeers and abuse and broke it into fragments when the duke Bentivolio who had been banished by the Pope came back. The duke Alfonso d'Este, an

expert at artillery, used the fragments to make a huge cannon that was called Julius.

After finishing his work Michael Angelo returned to Rome in the hope that the Pope would let him go on with the mausoleum.

But his enemies were setting fresh snares for him. Bramante could not rest and was trying to cause a fresh quarrel between the Pope and Buonarotti. With this purpose he invited to Rome his young relative Raphael Sanzio from Urbino. He guessed that Raphael was the only rival Buonarotti had to fear—not in sculpture, but in painting. Bramante decided to make Michael Angelo take to painting once more and began persuading the Pope that the ceiling of the recently rebuilt Sistine chapel ought to be covered with frescoes and that no one in the world could carry out this difficult task better than Michael Angelo. Bramante was hoping that if Buonarotti refused, the Pope would be angry with him and if he agreed Raphael would prove to be the better painter.

Michael Angelo understood his enemies' in-

tention and did his best to refuse the commission. He assured the Pope that the work ought to be given to Rafael, that he, Buonarotti, had lost the habit of painting and neither liked nor understood that art. But it was characteristic of Julius that the more obstinately Michael Angelo refused, the more the Pope insisted. It seemed as though another quarrel was in sight. Bramante was gloating over it.

"They are at loggerheads," he said to his confederates, gleefully rubbing his hands.

Michael Angelo understood at last that resistance was useless and with despair in his heart set to making the preparatory drawings.

The Sistine chapel was a long narrow building with high windows and smooth bare walls without any ornament. Plenty of light fell on the elongated ceiling, vaulted at the sides. Wishing to leave room for the celebration of services the Pope said that the lower part of the chapel was to be free from scaffolding. The planks had to be fixed high up with nothing to support them

in the middle; narrow dangerous steps were to be the only approach to them.

The Pope commissioned Bramante to build the scaffolding. It took the architect some time to decide how the work should be done. At last he thought of a way: he burrowed small holes in the roof and the ceiling and lowered cables through them by which light planks bridging over from one end of the building to another were to be suspended. This complicated network of web-like cables, cleverly hung in the air, was a miracle of art, but utterly useless.

When Michael Angelo saw it he laughed in Bramante's face:

"What are we to do with the holes when it is time to cover the place with frescoes?"

Bramante shrugged his shoulders in confusion and said that there was no other way of doing it since the Pope would not have the structure propped up from underneath.

Then Buonarotti went to Julius and said that Bramante's scaffolding was no good.

"If he doesn't know how to do it," replied

the Pope, glancing angrily at the architect, "do it yourself."

Bramante understood that he had fallen into the pit he had been digging for another.

Michael Angelo pulled down the cobweb of ropes and stopped up the holes; the ropes proved to be so many that his assistant Cosimo, the carpenter, to whom he gave them, made enough money by selling them to provide a dowry for his two daughters.

Buonarotti built the scaffolding without any ropes, skilfully fixing beams and planks on the projections of walls and connecting them in such a way that the more weight was laid upon it the more stable the structure became.

This was a revelation to Bramante; it taught him to build scaffolding and he made use of this lesson in working at St. Peter's cathedral.

Fearing that he would not be able to carry out his task alone, Buonarotti invited painters from Florence, Granaccio, Bugiardino, Bastianodi, San Gallo.

But he soon saw that helpers were useless;

they irritated him by their obstinacy and lack of skill. Gradually he began to avoid them and at last dismissed them altogether; they went home, offended and indignant.

Michael Angelo began his work alone, not allowing anyone on the scaffolding except the carpenter Cosimo who was not given to talking. Faced with almost insuperable difficulties, Buonarotti refused all help.

After finishing the first paintings he took to pieces a part of the scaffolding to have a look at his work from below and found that the figures were too small relatively to the height of the ceiling. He had to destroy all he had done and to start afresh.

The fresco of the Flood was ready, but during the night when the north wind "Tramontano" was blowing, the freshly plastered walls were covered with mildew. Michael Angelo saw the unsightly whitish stains that discoloured the painting and in places obliterated it altogether. He ran to the Pope.

"I told Your Holiness that painting is not my

business. All that I have done has perished. If you don't believe me send someone to have a look."

The Pope sent Juliano di San Gallo who examined the walls and saw that Michael Angelo had put on the plaster too damp: in the cold night the damp had come out as mildew. San Gallo reassured his friend and showed him how the mildew could be taken off without doing any harm to the painting.

This was Buonarotti's last attempt to free himself from the task he hated, the last hope at which he clutched as a drowning man snatches at a straw. His worst apprehensions were justified: the work absorbed him completely. It exhausted him like a painful illness. He thought he would die or go out of his mind before he had finished it. But he could not stop. The impossible attracted him like an abyss, like madness. Such was his nature: his mind despised the attainable. And he worked as though something were driving him, with desperate and irrevocable determination and extraordinary rapidity, straining

to the utmost his mental and physical powers.

He painted lying down with his head thrown back so that he could see the ceiling. His body had grown so accustomed to the painful position that when he stood up and held his head straight he could hardly see. His sight was giving way: he was afraid of going blind, and suffered from sleeplessness and giddiness. The only way he could read was by lifting the letter or paper above his head and raising his eyes to it. He did not come down from the scaffoldings for weeks at a time.

And when he did come down he hurried, morose and lonely, down the gay streets of Rome, painfully conscious of the people's curious glances at his exhausted face. He fancied he must seem like a ghost to them. The everyday human faces were more hateful to him than ever. If he saw a friend in the distance he carefully avoided him. He was tortured by a constant suspicion that enemies sent by Bramante were spying on him. When his acquaintances greeted him courteously he made no answer and turned away.

People began to say that Michael Angelo was suffering from melancholia and was not in his right mind, and the rumour reached the ears of the Pope.

XI

One hot day when it was unbearably close on the scaffolding Michael Angelo had been working since the morning, lying on his bench on wheels with a small wooden support for the head; it was covered with felt so that it should not rub the neck. His head was thrown back, beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead and at times drops of paint which he had just put on with his brush fell right on his face from the ceiling. He took no notice of it—he had grown used to it long ago. His face covered with patches of paint would have looked comical had it not been so repulsive and fearful.

He was painting the creation of man. In a whirl of tempest God the Father, surrounded by angels, descending from the sky to the body of

Adam lying on the bare earth was about to touch his hand with His to give him life. Michael Angelo was carefully putting in the last hardly perceptible shadows on Adam's arm, helplessly extended towards the Creator. It was a powerful, muscular arm but lifeless, slack, helpless as that of a sleeping child who must, but cannot, wake.

The familar sound of creaking steps came up from below. Buonarotti was always afraid of being caught unawares. He got up from his bench and walked to the door that had been purposely fixed in such a way that when Michael Angelo shut it from the inside none could come from the stairs to the scaffolding. The door would have to be broken before one could penetrate into his aerial fortress.

"Who the devil can it be?" the painter thought angrily and hid behind the planks by the door where he could see as from an ambush the person coming up the stairs. It proved to be a false alarm. Michael Angelo had forgotten

that he had sent Cosimo to the nearest shop to buy some bread and ham for lunch.

"It's you? I was afraid it was some intruder again. A letter?"

"Post from Florence," the sullen carpenter answered, clambering up the stairs.

"Give it me quick."

He took the letter but hesitated before opening it: he wondered if he had not better finish his work first and put in the last shadows, for he might forget them afterwards,—the letter would be sure to upset him for the day and make work impossible. Thoughts about his family and letters from his father and brothers were his only bitter diversion, the only echo of a far-off life. He had been receiving bad news from Florence of late: his youngest brother, Giovan-Simone, an unruly thoughtless youth, was leading a vicious life, disobeying his father, ruining the family, squandering their money on women—the cursed, the sacred money which he, Michael Angelo, was earning at the cost of such untold suffering—*his* money, his flesh and blood.

He opened the letter impatiently, read it and his face grew dark, his eyes flashed. He angrily kicked away his bench that rolled away with a pitiful squeak and indignantly paced up and down the creaking ricketty boards.

His father wrote to him about Giovan-Simone who had grown so insolent that not long ago, coming home drunk, he had threatened to thrash the old man.

"Wait a bit, I'll give you a lesson, you scoundrel!" Michael Angelo exclaimed, waving his hands and taking no notice of the quiet Cosimo who had been used for years to his master's furious monologues. Having finished his sparse lunch the carpenter was calmly doing something in the corner to a barrow of fresh plaster for the ceiling.

"You are a beast, not a man," Buonarotti went on, addressing some invisible person, "*anzi sei una bestia!* and I will treat you as one. Do you know, you luckless fellow, that if a son raises his hand against his father it is a case of life and death?"

He clutched at his head in despair.

"Oh dear, can't they leave me in peace? I wander about Italy, have no rest, suffer insults and privations, expose myself to endless dangers, exhaust my soul and body—all for them, for my father and brothers. And now when I have succeeded in making a home for them, this lunatic wants to destroy all that I have acquired with such difficulty. This shall never be, I swear! If ten thousand brothers came to me I'd settle them according to their deserts. I've burdens enough on my shoulders, I won't take up an ounce more!"

Several times he tried to overcome his emotion and resume work: he lay down on the bench, threw back his head with an habitual motion and rested it against the wooden support. But every time he jumped up again, threw down the palette and paced up and down the boards again. He had grown so used to his scaffolding that without thinking he took wider steps where necessary so as not to put his foot in the hole between the boards. He was choking with anger. Losing all

self-control he shouted and brandished his fists.

"I'll teach you, you milksop, to squander other people's money and set fire to your house and property. You wait till I come back to Florence, you puppy, and get at you. I won't consider your pride, Messer Giovan-Simone, I'll make you howl like a boy under the birch. Raising your hand against your own father! Oh, scoundrels, scoundrels, all of you!"

Without taking his hands out of the bucket, Cosimo turned his expressionless face to Michael Angelo.

"It's quite true what you say, Messer, they are all scoundrels. It makes me sick to look at them, they are a bad lot. The other day Bramante sent again to say he will give me as much money as I like if only I let him have a look at the ceiling when you are out. I said I'll send both him and his hanger-on, that youth from Urbino, Raphael, flying down the stairs if they dare come here. Scoundrels!"

Cosimo spoke shortly and incoherently, but master and servant understood one another at half a word, or even without words.

"Cosimo, have you ink and pen?"

"Of course I have, we have everything except bird's milk." Cosimo was proud of his housekeeping in their aerial dwelling place. He walked leisurely to the corner where there were two beds and, after rummaging among old clothes, kitchen utensils, wine bottles, pots of paint, mallets, carpenters' tools and boxes of plaster found an inkpot, pen and paper and gave them to Michael Angelo.

Squatting on the planks before the carpenter's bench the artist wrote quickly and decisively to his brother. In spite of everything he loved Giovan-Simone better than his other brothers, feeling that the boy's riotous behaviour expressed a temperament similar to his own.

But this time he said all that he thought without softening his expressions: *anzi sei una bestia!* He threatened to punish him cruelly if he did

not mend his ways. After sending the letter Michael Angelo breathed more freely.

The following day he worked at the fresco again.

He felt a thrill of joy when he looked at it. He knew that this joy would not last and that as soon as he had finished the work he would be disgusted with it. But moments of this delusive joy were his only reward and without them he could not have accepted or endured the agonies of artistic creation.

Michael Angelo rejoiced, thinking that it had all really happened as he depicted it and could not have been otherwise.

The blessed spirits, the first created Cherubim, hiding in the tempestuous folds of God's vestment, look with perplexity, terror and amazement, at their new brother, man, and the face of the Creator is full of goodness, which is perfect knowledge. But if He is good and knows all, why does He bring into being a creature doomed to sin and death?

XII

It was growing dusk, the artist was about to leave off work when once more he heard downstairs the hateful creaking of boards and voices of strangers.

"Messer Buonarotti, heigh, Messer Buonarotti!" someone was calling him without the slightest compunction.

"Again! The devils!" the artist muttered and was about to swear at the unwelcome visitor when, peeping out of his ambush, he saw the Pope Julius, with two of his grooms at the bottom of the stairs.

"Make haste, Messer Buonarotti, don't you see? His Holiness is waiting for you."

"His Holiness may go to the devil," Buonarotti thought, and making sure that neither Bramante nor Raphael Sanzio were with Julius he opened the door.

Coming down he greeted the Pope and asked his blessing, looking so cross that the old man could not help smiling; he was in good spirits.

"I don't advise you to go up, Holy Father," Michael Angelo said. "One step is broken and the carpenter has not had time to mend it. Heaven forbid, you might fall and there would be nothing left of you. Besides, it's growing dark and you wouldn't see anything."

But the Pope was pushing him impatiently towards the stairs.

"Now don't be obstinate, go first and give me your hand. If we fall we'll both be smashed—we'll die together as we have lived together."

There was nothing for it: one could not argue with the Pope. Michael Angelo climbed slowly and cautiously, holding the hand of the old man, who fearlessly mounted the narrow precipitous stairs without bannisters.

"You've turned into a savage, a regular savage on your scaffolding, Messer Buonarotti," Julius said jokingly. "One is afraid to come near you, you might bite any moment like a wolf."

Michael Angelo said nothing and thought: "I wish I could throw the old babbler down the steps." They climbed higher and higher: those

who were looking at them from below had to throw up their heads and it seemed as though the artist was leading the Pope to some unattainable height, to the very sky, where their shadows disappeared in the gathering darkness.

They reached the platform at last; the old man breathless with the climbing was gasping as he leaned on Michael Angelo's shoulder.

Then he walked round the scaffolding in silence, looking at the paintings. Sometimes, moved by curiosity, he lifted the pieces of rough canvas hung over the unfinished frescoes. Michael Angelo was in misery, but he had to lead His Holiness by the hand, politely warning him about holes between the planks and telling him where to plant his foot.

The Pope was impatiently munching his sunken lips and the artist saw that he was going to say something.

"There now," Buonarotti thought with boredom and aversion, "he is going to give me advice."

Julius put his face close to the Cumean Sybil

to see more clearly the powerful muscles of the sunburnt arm and hand with which the old giantess held on her lap an open book of prophecies she was reading.

"Yes, it takes some patience! Devilish work!" the Pope said, turning to the artist, "by my soul, I have never seen anything like it. But this is impossible, do you hear?"

"What is impossible, Your Holiness?"

"It's impossible to work like this, Buonarotti. What you are aiming at is more than a man can do. When do you expect to finish the ceiling if you paint every vein, every muscle?"

"I cannot work any differently," Michael Angelo replied.

"But for whose sake, tell me please, do you do it? When the scaffolding is taken down, the frescoes will be so high that no one will see all these wrinkles and muscles and folds. It is only if one stands here on the scaffolding and looks straight at the painting that one can appreciate these details. Why waste your time and strength? It's madness."

"I can't work any differently," Michael Angelo repeated, with unconcealed vexation.

"You repeat it like a parrot but you *must* work differently. Look here, Buonarotti, I am old, death is close upon me. I want you to finish the work before I die. You must finish it. You must be quick, do you hear? And I don't want you to put in every detail, I want you to hurry."

"In that case," Michael Angelo said malignantly in a low voice, "Your Holiness ought to have given the work to somebody else, say, to that clever young man, Raphael from Urbino, whom you and Bramante like so much. He would have painted the ceiling in no time and not have bothered about wrinkles and muscles which the mob gaping at the painting from below will certainly fail to observe. I am ready to destroy my work, but I will not allow anyone to spoil it."

Julius knocked his staff against the hollow floor boards.

"What, what did you say? Repeat it. Do you

want me to have you thrown off the scaffolding?"

"I can repeat it if you like," Michael Angelo replied unperturbed. "I said that I won't stir a finger sooner than is necessary for my work and that I will end it when I can."

"When you can!" the Pope said, shaking with anger, and coming closer and closer to Michael Angelo. "Wait a bit, you wretch, I'll teach you the way to talk to your father and benefactor!"

He hit the artist twice with his stick.

Michael Angelo looked him in the eyes without speaking. Julius grew still under his gaze. A few minutes later he was repentant. When they came down from the scaffolding the old man turned to Michael Angelo and was about to say something by way of leave-taking but glancing at the artist's face he felt at a loss. Angry with himself the Pope hastened away with his grooms as though he were guilty.

That same evening, the Pope's favourite, young Accorsio, came to Buonarotti, saying that he had been sent by His Holiness. With inno-

cent shamelessness he gave Michael Angelo a purse stuffed with gold—it contained five hundred gold pieces—begging him to forget the insult and doing his utmost to excuse the Pope's behaviour. Accorsio was so charming, he spoke with such an ingratiating smile and feminine charm, that Michael Angelo did not attempt to protest and did not feel angry. He took the gift, kissed the boy on the forehead and let him go in peace, saying that he forgave His Holiness for the insult.

Michael Angelo understood that Julius was ready to make peace with him at any price, fearing he might leave him again and escape to Florence.

XIII

The day for which Julius had been waiting so impatiently arrived at last. The ceiling was ready. Michael Angelo gave word for the scaffolding to be pulled down in 1512 on the Feast of All Saints. The clouds of dust raised by the

falling planks and beams had not yet settled when the Pope arrived accompanied by prelates, bishops and cardinals. Slanting rays of the sun fell through the narrow windows of the chapel piercing the blue columns of dust. And through it, as it were through a mist, the Pope saw inaccessibly high above him the work of Buonarotti. It seemed to Julius that the walls and the ceiling had opened out, and that he was looking up into fathomless heights.

In the centre there were nine frescoes depicting the creation of the earth and the sky, of the sun and moon, waters and plants and of the first man; Eve, his wife, coming out of Adam's side at the command of God; the Fall; the sacrifice of Cain and Abel; the Flood, and the mockery of their sleeping father's nakedness by Shem and Ham.

The young gods of the primeval elements—ever lighthearted and free—played around the nine central frescoes, unconscious of the mysteries contained in them, serenely accompanying the tragedy of the universe with dancing and singing.

Underneath them were prophets, sybils and giants, weighed down by wisdom and sorrow.

Lower still there were the ancestors of Jesus of Nazareth, a series of generations that obediently transmitted to one another the aimless burden of life, and suffered the pangs of birth, nurture and death. They had no part in the wisdom of the prophets or sybils, they did not hear the tempest of the Lord that stirred the gay throngs of the elemental gods. In the twilight of their homes, in family stillness, they merely loved, sheltered and tended their children, waiting for the mysterious Redeemer.

This was how Michael Angelo depicted the three stages of reality: the gladness of the gods, the wisdom of the prophets, the love of mothers for their children. But the tragedy of God and man, the mystery of existence, was solved neither by gladness, nor by wisdom, nor by love.

After examining the ceiling Julius embraced Michael Angelo.

"Glory be to you, Buonarotti" the Pope said, with tears in his eyes, "glory to you and to me,

for if it had not been for my persistence, for my standing over you, urging you on, and pestering you, you would never have finished."

A Cardinal who considered himself an authority on painting said, pointing to the ceiling:

"Don't you think, Your Holiness, that the frescoes ought to be worked up with gold and aquamarine? Or the simple people might think the ceiling rather poor. Gold is never amiss in a church."

The Pope turned to Buonarotti with a smile.

"What do you say to it?"

"I say, blessed Father, that I am not going to touch the ceiling any more: what I have done I have done. It is easy enough, of course, to make the frescoes gaudy with gold and aquamarine as is the custom in churches. But what for? The people I have painted did not deck themselves out in gold and luxurious garments."

The townspeople flocked to the Sistine Chapel. The frescoes were talked of everywhere: market women argued about painting. All the fashionable Roman courtesans discussed whether

Raphael or Michael Angelo were the greater painter.

Buonarotti went about like one lost. During the twenty months he had grown so used to his work that without it he felt more lonely than ever. Instead of well-deserved joy, there was a cold blank feeling of dreariness in his heart.

XIV

One day he wanted the leather bag with letters and papers that he had forgotten in a box among the remains of the scaffolding not yet cleared away from the chapel. Fortunately there were few people there that day: it was a feast, and they had all gone to St. Peter's.

Michael Angelo was rummaging in the box; no one could see him behind the piled-up beams and planks. He looked with secret regret at the dusty ruins of the inaccessible fortress where he had passed so many memorable days. As he searched for the bag, sorting out various odds and ends carefully put away by the thrifty Cos-

imo, he heard two visitors talking close by. To judge from the accent one of them was a foreigner from the north, probably a Flemish painter. Buonarotti recognised that the other was from Venice because he pronounced the Tuscan G softly, like a child, as though it were Z. He called his friend Messer Ziorzio instead of Giorgio.

Buonarotti tried to take no notice of their conversation, but he was struck by some of the words and expressions they used, and he listened to the discussion with interest.

"What? You still argue, Messer Ziorzio?" the Venetian protested warmly. "No, no, not all Averroes' Commentaries on Aristotle will help you to prove that Raphael can ever create anything like these frescoes."

"How do you know, Messer Federigo, what he may do? Raphael is young," answered the slow, level-headed Dutchman.

"Yes, he is young in years, Messer Ziorzio, but he has shown all he has in him. One can see right through him. Raphael is always copying."

"Copying nature, so much the better," Giorgio responded.

"Not only nature, that's just it. At first he imitated his teacher, Perugino, then Leonardo da Vinci, then ancient paintings he had discovered in Roman subterranean grottos. Now you will see how zealously he will imitate Michael Angelo: Raphael borrows from everyone."

"Borrows from everyone and repays them a hundredfold," Giorgio interrupted. "He makes old things new and other people's art his own."

"Oh, I don't gainsay it, he is a great painter, the greatest and most inimitable of imitators . . . by the way, have you heard, Messer Ziorzio that before the ceiling was ready he tried through Bramante to persuade His Holiness to dismiss Michael Angelo, and let him, Raphael, paint the other half of the ceiling? Don't you see he is conscious of his own weakness and is afraid? If he weren't he wouldn't use such means."

"You are speaking of the man, not of the artist. What do I care about the man, Messer Federigo?"

"Like artist, like man. Raphael has sullied himself by greed. He loves art and fame but he loves even more savoury pieces off Cardinals' tables, his horses and his mistresses, and the luxurious house Bramante has built for him. He paints Madonnas but lives like a pagan Epicurean. He deceives the simple, pretending to be an unworldly innocent dreamer, but this *fortunato garzon* as my friend Francio calls him, this cherub descended from the heights of Urbino, can look after his own interests remarkably well. He has what he deserves and what he wants; yes Raphael, the lucky boy, has won immortal fame. What more would you have? He will remain forever the idol of men who like pleasant, accessible, superficial art, of unthinking sentimental people and be the god of painting for the crowd."

"And who is the god of the elect?" the Dutchman asked. Messer Federigo pointed to the ceiling of the chapel.

"He who has done this. I would advise the lucky boy never to try and rival him."

"There is a great deal of truth in what you say, Federigo, but I should like to say something in reply—only I don't know if I can express my thought. I speak Italian badly, and I am not used to talking of such things. . . ."

Michael Angelo forgot what he had come for and stopped rummaging in the box: he eagerly pressed his ear to the thin boards so as not to lose a word and felt his heart beating faster and faster he did not know why. He was waiting for Messer Giorgio's reply with a tremor of fear.

"You see, Federigo," the Dutchman began, slowly and haltingly, fumbling for words, "you say Michael Angelo is a thinker . . . I don't deny that, of course: he is a thinker. He thinks and he knows what he wants. And also he has power—that's the chief thing, no one else has such power. When one looks at his work one admires it all the time and one can see that he has been striving to do it well, better than any one had done before. One thinks how he must have struggled and what strength he has. Buona-

rotti has nothing that he hasn't paid for, he takes just as much as he earns. But with Raphael it's different. One doesn't see that he has been working, it all seems to have been done of itself, by accident; he doesn't try to do well but it comes out better than when people do try. It comes easy to him, it costs him nothing. When one looks at the Greek statues that are dug out of the ground one imagines that these too would be easy to make. But just you try! That ease is the most difficult thing of all, it is the last word in art, it's something that cannot be done without God's help, it's a miracle. And it is more important than thought, because this is where all thoughts come from and return to. I am not speaking clearly, Messer Federigo, but perhaps you will understand Michael Angelo is against God, and Raphael is with God—that is why he finds everything easy and his soul is clear as a mirror. You talk of money, of horses, of women, but all that is trivial, unimportant. Why speak of it? Raphael may do wrong and live like a pagan, and yet his soul is clear. Michael Angelo does

right and lives like a saint, but his soul is dark and terrible, and there will never be any light in it. I know that Michael Angelo is stronger than Raphael, but think of the words of the Scripture, Messer Federigo: God is not in storms but in stillness."

. . . . . .

Thirty years after this conversation, on October 24, 1542, Buonarotti wrote in a letter to Bishop Marcus Vigerius, Monsignor Sinegel:

"All the disagreements between Pope Julius and myself were caused by Bramante's and Raphael's jealousy. This was the reason why the Pope did not go on with the mausoleum and so ruined me. As to Raphael he had good reason to be jealous of me because it was from me he learned all he knew about art."

Michael Angelo knew that his words were unjust, but wrote them all the same, for he was jealous of Raphael, the lucky and insignificant boy.

XV

Many years had passed since Buonarotti had finished the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Old age was approaching, but in spite of his labours and sufferings his health seemed to grow stronger instead of weaker. He used to say jokingly that men who deal all their lives with stone end by turning into stone themselves. Only his face was wrinkled, his skin turned dark and dry, and he grew uglier than ever. When little children met him by chance in a deserted street at dusk they ran away crying and told their mothers they had seen the devil.

Vittoria Colonna, widow of the Marquis of Pescara and daughter of the proud Fabrizio Colonna, lived in retirement like a nun after her husband's death, but in spite of her piety she preserved the pride of her ancient family.

Vittoria respected Michael Angelo's genius and allowed him to love her, but he never forgot that she belonged to another, her late husband, the only man whom she had loved all her life.

And so they had both grown old and all those long years Michael Angelo had never once told her that he loved her. Even in his poems he worshipped her from afar; his sonnets and madrigals were full not of passion but of Platonic rhetoric, fashionable at the time.

"When a sculptor," he wrote to her, "designs a statue he first models it in clay and then chisels it in marble. Likewise, I was an imperfect shape of clay until your chisel, Madonna, made a new man of me. But what agony my rebellious heart must go through if you are determined to train and chastise it to the end!"

One cold and wet evening at the end of February, 1546, Michael Angelo set out from his little house at the foot of Monte Cavallo to the convent of Santa Anna dei Funari where the Marchioness Colonna, who had just arrived in Rome from Viterbo, had invited him.

It was cold, fine rain was falling, the streets were dark and muddy. He was thinking of their meeting. One of the tortures of his love was that he could not picture her face when he did not

see her: he remembered every feature but could not combine them into a whole.

He had heard that the Marchioness had aged of late years. She was pursued by misfortune. Her relatives had perished in civil strife. The proud Colonnas had been humiliated and deposed by the Popes of the Farnese family. Vittoria was alone and friendless, surrounded by enemies. He knew that she had been seriously ill.

As he climbed the Convent stairs and asked the Benedictine Sisters the way to the apartment of the Marchioness, he felt his knees trembling and was ashamed that, an old man of sixty, he was as shy of meeting her as a boy in love.

He was brought into a big cell with white walls. The lights had not yet been lit, sinister twilight filtered through the dim, grey windows, bespattered with rain as it were with tears. The Angelus sounded like a bell tolling for a funeral. He saw the Marchioness Vittoria, sitting in an armchair surrounded by nuns. There was a pang at his heart. An old woman was before him. Dressed in a gown of black silk she sat upright,

without leaning against the tall back of the chair and one could see in her proud bearing that she was the widow of the noble Marquis of Pescara, the daughter of Fabrizio Colonna, at one time the prospective Queen of Naples. Through the widow's veil that came low over her forehead and covered her shoulders, neck, and bosom, he saw her grey hair. Her faded mouth and her eyes that were still beautiful had an expression of sadness and calm; but he noticed in them a look of submissive kindness—a sign of old age.

He approached and greeted her respectfully. A faint colour overspread her cheeks. After the first insignificant words, when the nuns had retired to the other end of the room, Vittoria bent down to him and said softly, with a shy and diffident smile:

"You are surprised, aren't you, to see me like this, my friend? I have grown much older."

He wanted to say that she could never be old for him, that he loved her as much as ever, more than ever, but he did not dare to, and only looked at her with eyes full of such timid ten-

derness that she understood it all and rewarded him with a long grateful look. As she said goodbye to him that evening Marchioness Colonna, for the first and only time in her life, took Michael Angelo by the hand, and for several days afterwards, recalling her touch, he walked about lost in joy and wonder.

He took to visiting the Convent of St. Anna. In the presence of the Nuns they had long conversations about Biblical texts, about God, death, and the future life. He felt closer to Vittoria than he had ever done, and as thirty years before, wrote to her ardent, reverent and rhetorical sonnets in which he compared her to Laura and Beatrice, glorifying her immortal youth.

She fell ill again. There was in Rome a fresh outbreak of malaria, more virulent than usual. She was growing weaker and weaker before his eyes. He thought of the end but could not believe in it: it seemed to him impossible that Vittoria should die. As the day of their last parting drew nearer her smile grew more and more beautiful.

"She promises me so much," he wrote in his diary, "that when I look at her I fancy I grow young once more, though I am very old and it is too late. Death is between us, and I can love her with the old love only during the short moments when I forget about death. But my thoughts turn to it oftener and oftener, and the ardour of love is chilled by the deathly cold—*dal mortal ghiaccio e spento il dolce ardore.*"

Michael Angelo's forebodings came true. Vittoria died early in 1547. He did not shed tears, did not speak to anyone; he looked like a madman. His face expressed perplexity and a hopeless effort to grasp what had happened.

But he did not die nor go out of his mind, only everything within him seemed to have turned to stone.

Ten years after Vittoria's death Michael Angelo was telling one day the events of his long and unhappy life to a young painter, Ascanio Condivi, one of his few pupils, who was writing the story down for posterity. They were talking of Vittoria Colonna. Michael Angelo said little

but spoke calmly. Suddenly he said softly in a changed voice:

"Ascanio, I will tell you what I have never told anyone. When she lay in her coffin and I came to bid her goodbye, I kissed her hand but did not dare to kiss her on the brow. It's ten years that the thought of this has been torturing me, my son."

And forgetting his pupil's presence, he sat still and silent, lost in his memories. Slow tears trickled down his cheeks, furrowed by deep, ugly wrinkles.

XVI

Before his death Pope Julius II commissioned Michael Angelo to finish his mausoleum and left the money for it to his trustees, Cardinals Santi-Quatro and Aginenci. Buonarotti was particularly glad to resume the work of his youth. But the successor of Julius, Leo X, made him give it up again and go to Florence where the Pope wanted to have the front of his parish church,

San Lorenzo, adorned with marble. Michael Angelo implored to be left in peace and reminded Leo of the agreement with the trustees of Julius, but the Pope would not listen to him and merely said:

"Let me settle it all, I promise to do it to everyone's satisfaction."

And sending for both Cardinals he ordered them to release Michael Angelo from carrying out the contract. With tears in his eyes the painter left the luckless mausoleum and went to Florence to carry out the whim of his new master.

After Leo's death the enemies of Michael Angelo spread the rumour that he had received from the Pope Julius an advance of sixteen thousand *scudi* on the mausoleum and had kept the money without doing the work.

An endless lawsuit began which grew more and more involved each year and gave Michael Angelo no rest. It worried him so much that at last he wished he had borne the slander without a protest.

"They throw stones at me every day, as if I had crucified Christ," he wrote in 1542 to the Bishop of Sinegel, asking for his help. "This tomb of Julius will soon be my own tomb. Unnecessary honesty that was not appreciated has been my undoing. Evidently it is my fate. I am called a thief and a usurer, and many people say that I lent the money of Pope Julius on interest and have grown rich on it. If your Grace can say a word in my favour, say it, for I am writing you the truth. I consider myself an honest man before God and men, because I have never deceived anyone and also because in defending myself against scoundrels I am, as you see, in danger of going out of my mind."

He repeated in the letter several times in despair: "I am writing the truth. I should be glad for the Pope and all the world to read this letter. I am not a thief, not a usurer, not a robber, but a Florentine citizen, an honourable son of an honest man."

Under Pope Clement, Buonarotti began painting the choir of the Sistine chapel. He had the

wall plastered and covered with scaffolding from floor to ceiling. Clement wanted Michael Angelo to paint the Last Judgment, the last act of the tragedy painted on the ceiling of the chapel. But for many years the artist was disturbed in his work by the lawsuit. The Pope Paul, engaging Buonarotti, requested that he should finish the frescoes. The work was more than three-quarters ready when Paul wished to have a look at it; he saw that the huge wall behind the altar at which Mass was to be said was covered from top to bottom with naked bodies: neither the angels, nor the righteous, nor the sinners were ashamed of their nakedness: earthly veils had fallen, and they appeared before the throne of Divine Justice as naked as they had come from their mother's womb. Utterly disconcerted, the Pope did not know what to say. At last he turned to his Master of the Ceremonies, Messer Biagio di Cesepa, whom Vasari describes as a *persona scrupulosa* and asked his opinion.

Biagio said:

"It is the most shameless picture I have ever

seen, Holy Father. It is fit for public baths or a hostelry and nôt for a papal chapel! *Non opera di capella di papa ma da stufe e d'osterie!*"

Buonarotti heard these words and as he continued his work he gave a likeness of Biagio to Minos, who judges sinners in hell and has a snake-like tail twisted round his body.

The Master of the Ceremonies complained to the Pope but Paul answered him with a smile:

"You see, my friend, I might have done something if he had placed you in Purgatory but you are in Hell and no one can rescue you from there, for as you know, there is no redemption there—*Nulla est redemptio.*"

XVII

At that time there lived in Venice a famous writer, Pietro Aretino. He was the son of a disreputable woman at Arezzo whom he had robbed and run away from as a boy; he had been a bookbinder, a monk, a tramp, a flunkey, he had endured privations, hunger, blows, endless in-

sults but at last acquired fame and wealth by his pen, or, as he put it, by "inky sweat." He extorted money and honours from the mighty ones of this world by slander and flattery, by threats of writing a libel or a panegyric. Many Italian potentates and the Emperor himself paid Aretino a yearly pension. The most Christian King of France gave him a golden chain with a pattern of serpents' tongues—an emblem of venomous stings of satire. A medal was struck in his honour with the poet's head and a laurel wreath and the inscription *Divus Petrus Aretinus, flagellum principum* (The divine Peter Aretinus, the scourge of Princes) on one side, and on the other *Veritas odium parit* (Truth engenders hatred). The most malicious and impudent of his libels on princes who were slow in giving him presents bore his signature as *Divina Gratia homo libero* (by the grace of God a free man). With the greatest ease and rapidity he composed anything which he was commissioned to write. At Vittoria Colonna's request he wrote pious reflections and lives of the Saints, and at the

request of Marcantonio, a pupil of Raphael's, sonnets for such indecent engravings that at last the Pope had the painter imprisoned in spite of many Cardinals interceding for him. Aretino lived in regal splendour in a beautiful palace on the *Canale Grande*, the famous Casa Bolani, where he kept a constantly changing harem of beautiful women and a fine collection of objects of art. Titian was very attentive to him, painted his portraits and gave him his works. From all parts of Italy, pictures, drawings, bas-reliefs, medals, bronzes, ancient marbles, stones, majolicas, jewels, precious vases found their way to his palace. When it was so crowded that there was no more room in it he shared his artistic booty with princes or potentates who had deserved his favour: in his own words the poet gave kings crumbs from his table.

Out of vanity as well as from innate love of beauty, Aretino had long been regretting that he had not a single work of Michael Angelo's in his museum. Through his minions, Benvenuto Cellini and Giorgio Vasari, he had more than once

hinted to Buonarotti that it was his turn now; but the artist had not deigned to give any answer.

Then Aretino decided to throw out a hint himself. In 1537 he addressed to Buonarotti one of his famous epistles that spread throughout Italy in thousands of copies. He began by greeting the artist and went on to explain what aspects of his genius he most appreciated. The main part of the letter opened as follows:

"I, whose praise and blame have such power that at present people's good or bad fame is due entirely to me, I, who nevertheless am a small man and indeed a nonentity, venture to greet you, which I would not have presumed to do had not my name acquired a certain brilliance owing to the respect it inspires to the greatest sovereigns of our age. But in the presence of Michael Angelo all I can do is to feel reverence. There are many kings in the world but only one Michael Angelo, and he has eclipsed with his fame the names of Phidias, Apelles and Vigruvius." Aretino went on in the same vein until he

came to the "Last Judgment"; then he began giving advice and told the painter how the picture ought to be done. He concluded with fresh offers of serving Buonarotti and assurances of his readiness to glorify his name.

Buonarotti answered with a short and courteous note, slightly ironical in its exaggerated amiability.

Aretino chose not to see the irony, and sent another letter asking for a present of even the smallest drawing, one of those that the artist threw into the fire. Michael Angelo did not answer and for five years Aretino left him in peace.

In 1544 he informed Buonarotti that the Emperor Charles V had just shown him, Aretino, an unheard-of honour by allowing him to ride on his right hand. Cellini had written that Buonarotti was well disposed to Aretino. The poet prized it above all. He loved and revered Michael Angelo. He had wept with emotion when he saw a copy of the "Last Judgment." His friend Titian also had the greatest venera-

tion for Buonarotti and praised him enthusiastically.

Again Michael Angelo did not answer. Two months later the poet reminded him through his Roman friends that he was expecting a drawing. There was no answer. Aretino waited for a year and made another reminder. At last he received from Rome wretched bits of paper instead of a drawing—scraps that were a mockery rather than a present. He wrote to Michael Angelo that he was not satisfied and expected something more. Again there was no answer for several months. Aretino's patience was exhausted. He wrote a menacing letter to Cellini: Buonarotti ought to be ashamed, let him say straight out whether he intends keeping his promise; Aretino demanded explanations, otherwise his love would turn to hatred.

The threat had as little effect as the flattery. Meanwhile Titian who had been in Rome took the opportunity of gossiping about Michael Angelo to his patron Aretino and brought the two men to an open quarrel.

XVIII

In November, 1545, Buonarotti received the following letter from Venice:

"Messer, now that I have seen copies of the 'Last Judgment' I recognise in it, so far as the conception and the execution is concerned, the famous charm of Raphael. But as a Christian, as a man who has received the holy baptism, I feel ashamed of the unbridled freedom with which you presumed to desecrate that which should be the ultimate end of Christian faith and virtue.

"And so this Michael Angelo, so mighty in his fame, this Michael Angelo whom we all admire, has shown to men that he is as far from piety as he is near to perfection in art. How could it have happened that the painter who likens himself unto God and so cuts off almost all relations with ordinary mortals has dared to defile with such work the temple of the Most High, the chief of Christian altars, the foremost

chapel of the world, where great Cardinals, reverend priests, and the Vicar of Christ himself partake of our Lord's Body and Blood in the holy and mysterious sacrament?

"If the comparison did not seem almost criminal I would venture to remind you how in my frivolous dialogues about courtesans I succeeded in clothing a shameless subject in noble and tender words. You, on the contrary, while dealing with a lofty subject, have deprived angels of their heavenly glory, and the righteous of their earthly modesty. Even Pagans veiled Diana's figure, and when they modelled naked Venus they took care that a chaste gesture of her arms should take the place of clothes for her. But you, a Christian, have reached such godlessness that in the Pope's chapel you dare to outrage the modesty of holy Virgins and Martyrs. Indeed it would have been better for you to have renounced Christ altogether than, while remaining a believer, to mock your brethren's faith. But let me tell you, Heaven will not per-

mit the criminal boldness of your wonderful art to remain unpunished. The more marvellous your picture the more certain it is to be the tomb of your fame."

Then Aretino passed to his own grievances: he reminded the painter that he had not fulfilled his promise to send a drawing.

"Though indeed if the mountains of gold you received from Pope Julius could not induce you to carry out your duty and build the promised mausoleum, what hope could there be for a man like me? But to pocket another person's money and to break your word is a wrong thing to do and the name of it is theft."

In conclusion he advised the Pope to destroy the "Last Judgment" and show an example of the same pious zeal as Pope Gregory had once shown in destroying the statues of the Greek gods, however beautiful.

"Had you taken my advice," he continued, addressing Buonarotti, "had you carried out the directions I gave you in my letter, now known to the whole world,—in which I explained to you

scientifically and in detail the arrangement of the heavens, paradise, and hell, Nature would have had no occasion to be ashamed of having endowed with so great a genius a man like you. On the contrary my advice would have saved your work from all envy and malice for ever and ever.

Your servant, Aretino."

The letter was copied out in somebody else's handwriting, so that Michael Angelo should have no doubts about its being circulated all over the world, but at the end there were some lines written in the hand of Aretino himself:

"Now that I have to some extent vented my fury caused by the rudeness with which you responded to my kindness, and when, I venture to hope, you have sufficient evidence that if you are divine (*di-vino*), made of wine, I am not made of water (*dell'aqua*) either—tear this letter as I am ready to tear it, and admit that I deserve to receive answers to my letters even from kings and emperors."

XIX

When the Pope read one of the innumerable copies of this letter he was alarmed. His first thought was to follow Aretino's advice and have the "Last Judgment" destroyed. He was in no mood for joking now. The Holy Father was afraid of finding himself in the place where "*nulla est redemptio!*" There could be no doubt that the letter was meant for the Inquisition.

But growing calmer the Pope decided that the business could be settled to everyone's satisfaction: at the advice of Cardinal Caraffa he called Buonarotti and ordered him to clothe the naked figures in the picture. "Above all, clothe the angels," the Pope said, "you can leave the devils half naked, but the angels and saints must be dressed completely—no rags around the thighs, but long decent garments. . . . Don't bother about anatomy, and give wings to those who ought to have them."

Michael Angelo refused. Then the Pope entrusted the task to his pupil, Daniele da Val-

terra, who set to work zealously, and a few days later, to Paul's great comfort, the Martyr Biagio with the scraper, and St. Catherine with the wheel were dressed. Valterra received a good sum of money for spoiling his master's work. Buonarotti submitted in silence and did not even quarrel with his pupil.

Then not only his enemies but his best friends turned against him and said he must be in his dotage to resign himself without protest to such desecration of his picture.

Buonarotti was indifferent to it all because at that time his last friend, his old trusted servant, the carpenter Cosimo Urbino, was dying. In a letter to Giorgio Vasari, Michael Angelo wrote about this death.

"It is difficult for me to write but I will say a few words in answer to your letter. You know about Urbino's death. It was a divine favour to me, but it caused me much grief and distress. It was a favour because he who had kept me alive while he lived, taught me by his death to die fearlessly with love for death. He had been with

me for twenty-six years, and was a rare trustworthy man. Now that I had made him rich and hoped that he would be the support of my old age, he is gone and all that is left me is the hope of seeing him in paradise. The Creator has inspired me with this hope at the sight of his happy death; he regretted not that he was dying but rather that he was leaving me alone in this treacherous world amidst troubles of every kind. He has taken the greater part of me with him and left me only innumerable miseries. I commend myself to your attention."

Michael Angelo survived the reigns of six Popes: Julius II, Leo X, Clement VII, Paul III, Julius III, Paul IV. All his friends and contemporaries were dead. He was surrounded by a new and alien generation. In the spring of 1549 he was seriously ill. The doctors reassured him but failed to help. He could not sleep at night, groaning with pain. He was seventy-five, everyone thought he would die, but he recovered.

He grew more and more gloomy every day; he thought of nothing but death.

"I am old," he said to his pupil, Condiva, "death has robbed me of all my youthful thoughts; those who do not know what old age is must have the patience to live to it. They cannot know it until then."

He thought of his love for Vittoria but the hope of meeting her in another world did not comfort him.

He wrote in his diary: "After crossing the stormy sea of life in a flimsy boat I have reached the stage at which we must give account for everything. And now I have learned what a deception my love for art was, since all human desires on earth are a deception. And what has become of my dreams of love, once so vain and gay, now that I am approaching two deaths,—the inevitable death of the body and the imminent death of the soul? Neither painting nor sculpture satisfy any more my heart, turned to the Love that on the Cross opens Its arms to receive us."

He prayed, but there was no light of Christ

in his soul, and it seemed to him he was doomed by God to eternal perdition.

"Woe is me, woe is me; as I recall the many years that passed I cannot find among them a single day I could call my own. I have felt all human passions: I wept, I loved, I longed, was aflame, but I have not done anything good in my life. And now I am gradually going. The shadows are gathering; the sun is setting, and, tired and exhausted, I am ready to fall." He went on working, without purpose, without joy, from mere habit. One day at the end of August, 1561, while he was at work, he fell down unconscious. When members of his household ran to his assistance and restored him to consciousness he said he had fainted because he had risen early that morning and had stood bare-footed for three hours on the cold floor at his writing desk. In two days' time he recovered and began work again, doing architectural drawings and plans for St. Peter's Cathedral. He was eighty-six years old. It seemed he would never die.

But early in 1564 there were signs of the end

approaching. His strength declined slowly. He shivered for days and nights together—no warm clothes could save him from the exhausting inward chill. The anguish of death was upon him. He gave up work. A young Florentine physician, Federigo Donati, looked after him.

XX

On the evening of February 14th Federigo rode up on his mule to Buonarotti's house: he lived at the time in the square of the ancient forum of Trajanus, next to the church Santa Maria di Loretto. In front of the house there was a small walled garden with laurels in it. A cold Tramontano was blowing; low dismal clouds crept along the sky. The doctor was surprised to see Michael Angelo walking about in the garden in the rain. Last year's dead leaves rustled under his feet. A crow was cawing dejectedly on the wet tiles of the neighbouring roof.

"Messer Buonarotti," Federigo remarked,

"you ought not to be out of doors in such weather."

"There's nothing for it," Michael Angelo answered, "I don't feel well . . . I am restless. It's worse indoors. So I have come out for a walk. I am dreary, Messer Federigo, I can't tell you how dreary. . . ."

And he went on hurriedly pacing up and down the tiny garden stepping in the muddy pools and rustling the wet laurel leaves. He spoke incoherently and had difficulty in finding words.

It was only before the very end that he took to his bed. He received Holy Communion and when they asked him about his last will he said:

"My soul—to God, my body—to the earth, my property—to my relatives."

Then he asked to be buried in his native city, Florence. He died on the 18th of February, at the hour of *Ave Maria.*

He passed away peacefully. His request was not carried out: he was buried in Rome in the church of the Holy Apostles.

But Cosimo Medici, Duke of Florence, wished

that the remains of Michael Angelo should rest in Florence. His emissaries secretly dug out Buonarotti's body, sewed it up in a sack as one sews up a bale of goods and despatched it to Florence.

The Florentine Academy of Drawing decided to arrange a solemn funeral. There were such crowds in the streets that the Academicians had difficulty in carrying the coffin into the church. They opened the coffin to have a last look at the master. They expected to find a half decomposed corpse, for twenty-five days had passed since his death. But to everyone's surprise the body had not been touched by corruption: the master lay in his coffin, looking small, dark, withered like a mummy. There were lines of pride and bitterness on the wide ugly mouth. Death had not smoothed them out.

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Wishing to honour the artist's memory the Academicians had converted the church into a museum, filling it with allegorical figures, statues and pictures by Michael Angelo's pupils and

followers. These productions look like miserable caricatures of the Master's works. A single glance at them was enough to convince one that art was degenerating. But no melancholy reflections occurred to the Academicians. The Honorary Deputy of the Academy, Giorgio Vasari, looked particularly triumphant in spite of his genuine affection for the dead man. Vasari's face was glowing with self-satisfaction. On the evening of the same day he described the brilliant funeral to his patron, Duke Cosimo Medici:

"Illustrious and most excellent Sir,

"This morning, that is, on the 14th of the current month, the burial of the divine Michael Angelo Buonarotti took place to the complete satisfaction of the public that crowded the church of San Lorenzo; there was such a number of persons of rank, noble ladies and distinguished foreigners that one could only marvel at it. The Vice-President of the Academy sat in the middle of the church facing the pulpit, the members of the Academy sat in order

of rank in the most conspicuous place. Twenty-five young men, students of drawing, sat below the Academicians. Some of these are certainly young men of promise. Seeing eighty painters and sculptors in the church this morning, the public was delighted. I do not think there have ever been so many and such excellent artists in the world as there are at the present time.

"It is impossible to describe how gorgeous and beautiful the mausoleum was, and how impressive were the statues adorning it! Every one of the young artists has tried to do his best and they have all done their work so well that the statues after being whitewashed and marbled seemed to have grown bigger and more elegant. The church was ornamented with skeletons each of which was cutting off a stalk with three lilies upon it, symbolising the three arts. The skeletons seemed sorry that they had to cut off the flowers and could not alter the decree of nature. Among the skeletons was placed the figure of Eternity towering over Death.

"Indeed, my dear Sir, my Superiors and I

bless the time and labour we have spent in arranging it all, for this funeral was an occasion for your Serenity to visit the Academy, and the Academy offers you for it its humble and heartfelt thanks. It sees that your Serenity appreciates our services and it is eager to serve you. For my own part, I am anxious that you should help artists and I will do my utmost to keep the arts alive."

Such was the last mockery, the last insult that life dealt to the great artist. But he no longer felt anything, and in the coffin his small, misshapen, stone-like face wore a look of calm disdain.

LOVE IS STRONGER THAN DEATH

A Florentine Novel of the Fifteenth Century

FLORENTINE citizens of the ancient family of Almieri had from time immemorial belonged to two noble guilds: some of them paid special homage to St. Anthony, the patron of butchers, others followed the wool trade and had the picture of a sheep on their banner. The brothers Giovanni and Matteo Almieri belonged, as their ancestors had done, to these two guilds. Giovanni kept a butcher's shop at the old market, *Mercato Vecchio*, Matteo had wool mills down the Arno. Customers readily called at Giovanni's shop, not merely because one could find there fresh hams, tender veal and fat geese, but because the owner's cheerful disposition and ready wit made everyone like him. No one could be better than Almieri the butcher at exchanging a clever joke with a passer-by, a neighbour, or a customer, or at speaking so freely about everything under the sun—the diplomatic mistakes of the Florentine republic, the plans of

the Sultan, the intrigues of the French king, and the sudden and apparently unaccountable pregnancy of the widow next door who had taken of late to visiting much too often the monastery of the worthy Certosian brethren. People seldom resented the butcher's jokes and he in self-defence quoted the ancient proverb that a joke could not harm a good neighbour, but made the tongue sharp as a sabre.

His brother Matteo, the wool-merchant, was a very different sort of man. Cunning and unctuous, he was always rather gloomy and reserved; he managed his affairs better than the careless and kindhearted Giovanni, and every year his two ships laden with wool left the Livorno harbour for Constantinople. He had lofty ambitions, looked upon trade as a means to public office, had leanings towards aristocracy—the fat people—*popolo grasso*, as they were called in Florence—and had hopes of raising the fortunes of the Almieri family and perhaps of bestowing deathless glory upon his name. He often tried to persuade his younger brother to give up

the butcher's trade as not sufficiently refined and to go into partnership with him. But Giovanni would not agree and although he looked up to his "quiet" brother and respected him for his intelligence, he was secretly afraid of him and thought—even if he did not say it—"he makes the bed soft, but it will be hard to lie on."

One hot day Giovanni came home from the shop tired, ate as usual a heavy supper, drank some cold Greek wine, and was taken ill. He went to bed, and that same evening had a stroke, which was all the more dangerous because the butcher was stout and had a short neck. In the night he gave up his soul to God, not having had time to take the Sacrament or to make his will. His widow, Mona Ursula, a modest and virtuous but not a very intelligent woman, entrusted her husband's business to his brother Matteo, who had beguiled her with his quiet and insinuating talk. He persuaded the simple-hearted woman that Giovanni, in his carelessness, had left his accounts in disorder and died on the verge of bankruptcy, and that if she

wanted to save anything of her property it was essential to close the shop in the *Mercato Vecchio*. Gossips said that the "sly rogue," Matteo, had deceived the widow so as to carry out his old wish and put all Giovanni's money into the wool business. Be that as it may, from that time onwards Matteo's affairs improved wonderfully, and he began sending from Livorno to Constantinople five or six ships, instead of two, laden with excellent Tuscany wool. A few years later he was promised the profitable and honourable post of standard-bearer of the Wool Guild, the famous Florentine *Arte di Lana*. He generously gave his brother's widow a monthly pension,—so small that Mona Ursula had to endure many privations and to deny herself a great deal, especially as she had a young daughter to bring up, an only child called Ginevra, whom she loved tenderly; and in those days the number of young men in Florence ready to marry a girl without a dowry was as small as it is now. But the pious lady did not lose heart. She fervently prayed to all the Saints, and particularly to

St. Anthony, the kind patron and staunch defender of butchers in this life and the life to come, hoping that God, Who protects the fatherless and the widows, would send her daughter a good and worthy husband. She had all the more reason to reckon upon this as Ginevra was distinguished by rare beauty.

It was difficult to believe that a clumsy, stout, and jolly man like Giovanni, could have a daughter endowed with such exquisite charm.

Ginevra always wore dark and simple clothes; but the opening of her dress showed a finely gathered smock of beautiful linen, and round her lovely neck, rather thin and long, as with all Florentine girls, she wore a string of pearls, and on it an ancient cameo of chrysolite, with a figure of a Centaur. Her light hair, the colour of pale gold, was covered with a veil that reached halfway down the forehead, and was so transparent that one could see through it a number of small, carefully braided plaits, beautifully arranged in circles, or in patterns like vine or bracken leaves. Ginevra's pale, gentle face

resembled the face of the Madonna painted by Félippo Lippi for the Florentine Badia, representing the Immaculate Virgin appearing to St. Bernard in the desert and turning the leaves of his book with long slender fingers, pale as the wax of church candles. Ginevra's childish lips, her calm melancholy eyes and highly arched, hardly perceptible eyebrows had the same expression of perfect innocence, that no evil could touch. And although she breathed of morning coolness and the freshness of lilies, she seemed fragile and delicate, too frail and exquisite for this world. When the daughter of Almieri the butcher walked to church down the streets of Florence, quiet and modest, with downcast eyes carrying a prayer-book in her hands, gay youths hastening to a feast or to a hunting party pulled up their horses, laughter and jokes died down, and with a grave expression they gazed with respectful eyes at the beautiful Ginevra.

Her Uncle Matteo, hearing the praises of his niece's virtues, conceived the intention of marrying her to a man no longer young, but respected

by everyone, and connected with the Albizzi, who at that time ruled the city—one of the secretaries of the Florentine Republic, Messer Francesco degli Agolanti. He was a great Latin scholar and wrote official reports and papers in the solemn style of Livy and Sallust. Being of somewhat morose and unsociable disposition he was irreproachably honest, and there was something of an ancient Roman about him. He looked indeed like a Senator of the times of the Republic and managed to wear the long, full, red cloth uniform of the Florentine officials as though it were a Roman toga. He loved ancient literature so passionately that when the Greek tongue became fashionable in Tuscany, and a learned Greek from Byzantium, Emmanuel Chrisolaros, began teaching grammar in the *Studio*—the University of those days—Messer Agolanti, in spite of his age, and his post as Secretary of the Florentine Republic, did not scruple to sit down with little boys to the study of Greek. He began with the alphabet, and grew so proficient in the language that he read

Aristotle's *Organon* and Plato's *Dialogues* in the original. In short, the cunning and ambitious wool-merchant could not imagine a better and more advantageous match for his niece. He promised to give her a good dowry on condition that Messer Agolanti should join his name and crest to that of the Almieri.

But in spite of the numerous and obvious virtues of her suitor, Ginevra opposed her uncle's wishes and the wedding was put off from year to year. When at last Matteo insisted on a quick and decisive answer she declared that she had another suitor who was dearer to her heart, and—to the great surprise and even alarm of the pious Mona Ursula—named Messer Antonio de Rondinelli. He was a young and poor sculptor, who had a studio and a few pupils in a narrow street not far from Ponte Vecchio. Antonio met Ginevra in her mother's house. A few months before he had asked permission to model the girl's head in wax. Ginevra's beauty was well known amongst the Florentine painters and sculptors, and he wanted to portray her in the

carved icon of St. Barbara, which had been ordered by a rich convent near Florence. Mona Ursula could not refuse the sculptor in so pious a task, and during the work the painter fell in love with his beautiful model, as once upon a time Pygmalion fell in love with Galatea. Afterwards they met at city festivals and winter gatherings at friends' houses where Ginevra was always welcome, for her presence was enough to adorn any feast.

When Mona Ursula, with many polite and timid apologies, tried to tell Matteo that Ginevra had another suitor whom she loved, and named Messer Antonio de Rondinelli, the wool-merchant, though secretly very much angered, assumed a humble and kind expression and in a low voice spoke to Mona Ursula as follows:

"Madonna, if I had not heard with my own ears what you said to me just now, I should never have believed that a virtuous and sensible woman like yourself could pay the slightest attention to the thoughtless caprice of an inexperienced child. I don't know how things are

now, but in my time young girls did not dare to hint at choosing a husband, but completely obeyed the will of their fathers or guardians. Just think, who is this Messer Antonio whom my niece has honoured with her choice? Don't you know that it is only men who can do nothing better and can follow no profitable or honourable trade that go in for being sculptors, painters, poets, actors and street singers? They are the most thoughtless and unreliable people on earth, drunkards, foul-mouthed rakes, sluggards, infidels, wasteful both of their own and other people's property. As to Messer Antonio, you must have heard what all Florence is saying about him, and what I know as well as other people. I will remind you of only one habit this young man has. He has a round basket hanging in his studio on a string thrown over a pulley, so that one end is tied to the basket and another to an iron nail in the wall. Antonio throws into that basket all the money he earns without counting it. And anyone who likes, whether it be a pupil or a friend, may come and lower the

basket without asking the master's permission and take out as many coins,—copper, silver, or gold—as he likes. Do you imagine, Madonna, that I'll trust my money, the dowry I promised your daughter, to such a lunatic? And this isn't all: do you know that Messer Antonio entertains in his mind the vile and godless doctrines of the Epicurean philosophy, inspired by the devil? That he doesn't go to church, laughs at the holy Sacraments, doesn't believe in God? Good people say that he is more ready to worship the marble fragments of the vile heathen idols, the wanton gods and goddesses whom they have begun digging out of the earth than the holy relics and miracle working images of God's saints? And other people, just as trustworthy, have told me that all night in his studio he and his pupils cut up corpses, bought at a good price from hospital warders. He says he does it to study anatomy, the structure of the human body, the nerves and the muscles, and so to perfect himself in his art, but I think he does it to please his teacher and adviser, the devil, the

old enemy of our salvation, who instructs him in black magic. For it certainly is by no other means than magic, charms and diabolical spells that this heretic has won your innocent daughter's heart."

Matteo frightened Mona Ursula by saying these and similar things and made her believe all he pleased. When Ginevra was told that if she persisted in her refusal to marry Messer Francesco degli Agolanti her Uncle Matteo would take away their monthly pension and Mona Ursula would be left destitute in her old age, the young girl, utterly broken-hearted, submitted to her fate and agreed to do what her uncle wished.

That year a great calamity overtook Florence. It had been foretold by many astrologers on the ground that in the heavenly sign of Scorpio, Saturn had come too close to Mars. Some merchants coming from the East brought in the big bales of precious Indian carpets the infection of the plague. A solemn church procession was organised and passed through the streets

to the singing of pitiful *miserere* while the miraculous image of Our Lady Impruneta was carried by the Archbishop, followed by the rest of the clergy. Laws were issued prescribing measures for isolating the sick and prohibiting the piling up of rubbish within the city walls and the pollution of the waters of the Arno with the decomposing refuse from tanneries and slaughter houses. It was forbidden under penalty of a fine, of imprisonment, and in some cases even of death, to leave the dead in the house until sunset if the death had occurred in the course of the day, or until sunrise if it had taken place in the night, even though the relatives asserted that it was due not to plague, but to some other disease. The city was patrolled by special watchers who had the right to search people's houses and to knock at their doors any time of the day or night asking if anyone was sick or dead. The terrible pitch-covered carts, with smoking torches, appeared everywhere, accompanied by masked silent men in black clothes carrying iron hooks with which they took

hold of the corpses from a distance so as to avoid infection, and lifting them, piled them up on the carts. It was rumoured that these men, whom the people had nicknamed "the black devils," seized not only the dead but also the dying to save themselves the trouble of returning to the same place. The epidemic had begun in the late summer, continued throughout the autumn, and the winter cold, which came very early that year, did not stop it. For this reason, well-to-do people who were not kept in the city by important business hastened to leave it for their country villas where the air was fresher and more healthy.

Matteo, fearing that anything might happen, and that his niece's obedience might not last, hurried on the wedding under the pretext that Mona Ursula and her daughter ought to leave the town as soon as possible and that Messer Francesco degli Agolanti proposed to take a holiday immediately after his marriage and to go with Ginevra and her mother to his charming villa on the slopes of Monte Albano.

Such was Matteo's wish and it was carried out. It was arranged that the wedding should take place in a few days, and it was celebrated quietly, without any lavish expenditure as befitted those sad times. Ginevra stood at the altar looking white as a sheet, and her face wore an expression of strange calm. But her uncle continued to hope that her girlish fancies would disappear like magic after the ceremony and that Messer Francesco would know how to win his young wife's love. His hopes were not realised. When after leaving the church the bride entered her husband's house she fainted and fell down like one dead. At first it was thought she was only in a deep swoon and every effort was made to restore her to consciousness, but her eyes would not open, her breath grew weaker and weaker, a deadly pallour overspread her skin and her limbs turned cold. A few hours later the doctors were called in (in those days people were none too ready to call them in, for fear of their spreading the rumour that there was infection in the house) and when a mirror was held before

Ginevra's lips no trace of moisture showed on its surface. Everyone, struck with unspeakable grief and compassion, was convinced that this really was death, and not a mere semblance of it. The neighbours whispered that God was punishing Almieri for so reprehensively celebrating the wedding at such a time and that Messer Francesco's bride was stricken down by the plague the moment she came home from church after the ceremony. These rumours spread the more easily because the girl's relatives, afraid of the "black devils' " visit, concealed from everyone till the last moment Ginevra's fainting fit and death. But the neighbours had told the overseers of all that had happened in Almieri's house and towards evening the men came demanding that Ginevra's body should be given to them, or buried immediately by her relatives. Eventually, after much arguing and receiving a good bribe they agreed to leave the corpse in Messer Francesco's house till the following evening.

But indeed none of Ginevra's relatives doubted her death except her old nurse of whom no

one took any notice, thinking that she was in her dotage and did not know what she was saying. The old woman implored them pitifully not to bury Ginevra, insisting that the doctors were mistaken and that the girl was asleep and not dead. She assured them that "when she put her hand to her little dove's heart she could feel it stirring faintly, more faintly than a moth's wing."

The day had passed and as Ginevra still showed no sign of life she was wrapped in a winding sheet, placed in a coffin, and carried to the cathedral church of the Santa Reparata. The dry and spacious burial vaults paved with smooth Tuscany bricks was in a recess between two church doors, in one of the so-called grave yards (*avello*) under the shadow of tall cypresses where noble Florentine families had their tombs. Matteo Almieri paid a large sum for a grave in such a place,—too fine in the opinion of some for a butcher's daughter,—but he took the money out of Ginevra's dowry. The funeral service was most impressive. There was no stint

of wax candles and the beggars were given a bushel of barley and a half soldi worth of olive oil each that they should pray for the soul of the departed. In spite of the cold and the fear of plague many people came to the funeral; even some of those who had not known Ginevra could not refrain from tears when they heard the sorrowful tale of the young bride's death and repeated Petraca's lovely line:

Morte bella pareo nel suo bel viso.

Messer Francesco made a speech over the coffin, quoting not only Latin authors, but Plato and Homer in Greek; this was a novelty and pleased many of the listeners though they did not understand Greek.

Only at the end of the funeral was there a disturbance. The coffin had been carried out of the cathedral and placed in the burial vault for the last leavetaking. A tall man, wearing a silk mourning cloak, went up to the dead girl and throwing back the veil from her face gazed intently at her. He was asked to move since it was not seemly for him, a stranger, to take leave of

the dead before her own people had done so. When the pale man heard himself called a stranger while Matteo and Francesco were said to be her own people he smiled a bitter smile, kissed the dead girl on the lips, replaced her veil, and moved away without a word. People in the crowd whispered and pointed to him, calling him Messer Antonio de Rondinello, Ginevra's lover for whose sake she had died.

It was dusk and the funeral being over the crowd dispersed. Mona Ursula wished to spend the night by the coffin but Uncle Matteo opposed it: she was so worn out with grief that they feared for her life.

Only Fra Mariano, a Dominican, was left in the vault to read the prayers for the dead.

Several hours passed; the monk's measured voice, and at times the slow metallic notes of the clock in Giotto's campanile resounded in the night stillness. After midnight Fra Mariano grew thirsty and pulling a flask of wine out of his pocket took a few gulps with relish when suddenly he heard a gentle sigh. He listened at-

tentively; the sigh was repeated, and this time he fancied that the veil over the dead girl's face had stirred. A shiver of horror ran down his spine, but since he was no novice at the job and knew perfectly well that even experienced men left alone with a corpse at night have all sorts of fancies, he decided to take no notice of anything, crossed himself, and went on reading the prayers in a loud voice. Some time passed in this way. Suddenly the monk's voice broke off and gasping with horror he gazed dumbfounded at the dead girl's face. It was no longer a sigh, but a moan that came from her lips—Fra Mariano had no doubt of it for he could see her breast rise and fall slowly, stirring her veil,—she was breathing. Making the sign of the cross and shaking in every limb, he rushed to the door and ran out of the vault. Recovering in the fresh air, he again thought it had only been his fancy and whispering a few *Ave Marias* he came back to the door and peeped into the vault. A cry of horror escaped him; the dead girl was sitting in the coffin with her eyes open. Fra Mariano rushed

headlong through the churchyard, through the Square of the Baptisteria San Giovanni, and down Ricasoli Street, his wooden sandals click-clacking on the frozen brick pavement.

Waking up from her trance or death-like swoon, Ginevra Almieri gazed round the vault in perplexity. She felt horror-stricken at the thought of having been buried alive; with a desperate effort she climbed out of her coffin and wrapping the winding sheet round her went out of the door, which the monk had left open, into the church yard and then into the square in front of the Cathedral. The moon was shining through the rapidly moving clouds chased by the wind, and Giotto's marble tower showed white in the moonlight. Ginevra's thoughts were confused, her head reeled; she fancied the tower was flying with her into the moonlit clouds and could not understand whether she was alive or dead, asleep or awake.

Not knowing where she was going she passed through several empty streets and seeing a familiar house went up to the door and knocked. It

was her Uncle Matteo's house. The wool merchant had not yet gone to bed although the hour was late. He was expecting a messenger to bring him news of his two ships returning from Constantinople. There was a rumour that a number of feluccas and big Florentine galleys had perished in the storm near the Livorno coast, and Matteo was afraid that his ships were among them. He had grown hungry as the night advanced and ordered his servant Nencia, a handsome red-haired girl with freckles and milk-white teeth, to roast him a capon. Matteo was an old bachelor, but he always kept young servant maids. That night he was sitting by the hearth in the kitchen because all the other rooms were cold. Nencia, her sleeves tucked up and her face flushed, was turning the spit over the bright fire and the bright flame was reflected in the polished surface of the spotless earthenware pots and dishes on the shelves.

"Nencia, do you hear?" asked Matteo, pricking up his ears.

"It's the wind. I won't go. You've made me go three times already as it is."

"Wind indeed! There's somebody knocking. It's the messenger. Make haste and open the door."

The plump girl walked lazily down the steep wooden stair, while Matteo lighted her way, holding a lantern above his head.

"Who is there?" the servant asked.

"It's me . . . Ginevra Almieri," answered a weak voice from behind the door.

"Jesus! Jesus! The power of the Holy Cross protect us," muttered Nencia; her legs gave way under her and to prevent herself falling she had to hold on to the banisters. Matteo turned pale, and very nearly dropped the lantern.

"Nencia, Nencia, make haste and open the door," Ginevra implored her. "Let me in to get warm, I am cold . . . Tell my Uncle it is I." Stout as she was the maid flew up the stairs so that the steps shook beneath her feet.

"There's a fine messenger for you! That's

what we've come to! I've told you, Messer Matteo, go to bed like all good Christians . . . Dear me! She is knocking again, do you hear? The poor soul is moaning and so pitifully too! Lord have mercy upon us sinners! St. Laurence, pray to God for us!"

"Look here, Nencia," Matteo said irresolutely, "hadn't I better go and see? who knows? . . . May be. . . ."

"What next!" Nencia cried, clasping her hands. "So you are being brave, are you? But I am not likely to let you go. Do you want to go to the next world yourself? You keep quiet and sit still and be thankful nothing worse has happened to you."

Taking a bottle of holy water from the shelf Nencia sprinkled with it the outer door, the stairs, the kitchen and Matteo himself. He did not argue any more and followed his clever servant's advice thinking that she knew better how to deal with ghosts. Nencia said in a loud voice:

"Blessed soul, go in peace, the dead to the

dead. May the Lord give thee rest in the abode of the righteous."

Hearing that they called her dead, Ginevra understood that she had nothing more to expect and getting up from the doorstep on which she had sunk in exhaustion she wandered on in search of shelter.

Hardly able to move from the cold she reached the next street where her husband's house was.

The Secretary of the Florentine Seignoria was engaged in writing a long philosophical letter in Latin to his friend in Milan, Mucius degli Uberti, who admired the ancient arts as much as he did. It was a regular theological treatise entitled "Dissertation on the immortality of the soul, on the occasion of the death of my beloved wife, Ginevra Almieri." Messer Francesco was comparing the doctrine of Plato with that of Aristotle and disputing the opinion of St. Thomas Aquinas who had maintained that Aristotle's philosophy could be reconciled with the dogmas of the Catholic Church con-

cerning paradise, hell, and purgatory. Messer Francesco proved by many clever and clear syllogisms that it was certainly not the doctrine of Aristotle, who was a secret sceptic and atheist, but that of Plato, a devout believer in gods, that could be reconciled with the Christian faith.

A copper lamp hanging over the slanting board of a comfortable writing desk of carved wood, with many drawers and partitions for paper, ink and pens, burned with a steady flame. The lamp was in the shape of a Triton embracing a sea-nymph for Messer Agolanti liked to have the beauty of ancient art reflected in the smallest details of everyday life. The precious parchment of an ancient manuscript of the Timeaus, tender as silk and firm as ivory, shone with the gold of the capitals representing a dance of naked Cupids or angels, wreathed in garlands of paradise flowers.

Messer Francesco had just begun a theological examination of the theory of metempsychosis or the transmigration of souls and had made a witty joke at the expense of the Pythagoreans

who, as everyone knows, do not eat beans believing that they contain the souls of their ancestors—when there was a light tap at the door. He frowned, for he could not endure noise when he was working, and chose for his writing the quiet hours of the night expressly to avoid disturbance.

He went to the window however, opened it, and peeping into the street saw in the pale moonlight the corpse of Ginevra wrapped up in the winding sheet.

Forgetting Plato and Aristotle, Messer Francesco closed the window so hurriedly that Ginevra had not had time to say a word and began whispering *Ave Maria* and crossing himself in superstitious terror just as Nencia had done.

He soon recovered, however, and ashamed of his own cowardice recalled what the Alexandrian neoplatonists, Proclus and Porphyry, had said about apparitions of the dead,—namely that the demons who live between heaven and earth and are creatures of a double and indefinite

nature, clothe themselves sometimes in transparent bodies that resemble the dead, and are formed according to some authorities out of the humid element of air condensed by the cold and according to others out of the fiery, colourless and transparent matter of which the lower vegetative souls of both the rational and the irrational earthly creatures consist; they do it either with the good purpose of uttering a prophecy or with an evil intention of horrifying people. Recalling all this, and explaining to himself what had at first so frightened him, Messer Francesco felt completely reassured, opened the window and said in a firm voice:

"Whoever thou mayest be, spirit of heaven or of earth, begone, withdraw, to the sphere whence thou hast come, for it is in vain thou seekest to frighten one whose mind is enlightened by the knowledge of true philosophy. Thou mayest deceive my bodily but not my spiritual vision. Go then in peace into Hades—the dead unto the dead."

And he closed the window, determined not to open it again were whole legions of pitiful ghosts to knock at his door.

Ginevra walked on and as she was not far from the Old Market she soon saw her Mother's house.

Mona Ursula was kneeling before a crucifix, and a stern monk with a pale face, exhausted by fasting, Fra Giacomo, stood beside her. She raised to him eyes full of terror.

"What am I to do, Father? Help me. There is no submission in my heart, no prayer. It seems to me God has forsaken me and my soul is doomed to perdition."

"Submit to God in all things to the end" the monk persuaded her, "do not murmur, subdue the voice of the rebellious flesh, for your excessive love for your daughter is of the flesh and not of the spirit. Mourn not for her bodily death, but only for her dying without confession and appearing before the Judgment Seat of the Almighty with all her sins upon her."

At that moment there was a knock at the door. "Mother, Mother, it's me . . . make haste and let me in!"

"Ginevra," Mona Ursula cried and was about to rush to the door when the monk stopped her.

"Where are you going, mad woman? Your daughter is lying dead in her coffin and will not rise before the Day of Judgment. It's an evil spirit tempting you with your daughter's voice, the voice of your own flesh and blood. Repent, I tell you, pray, pray before it is too late both for yourself and for Ginevra's sinful soul lest you both go to perdition."

"Mother, don't you hear me, don't you know my voice? It's me, I am alive, not dead! . . ."

"Let me go, Father, let me go!"

Then Fra Giacomo raised his arm and whispered: "Go and remember that henceforth you doom to perdition not only your own soul but Ginevra's also. God will damn you both in this world and the next."

The monk's face was full of such hatred, his eyes burned with such fire, that Mona Ursula

stopped, horror-stricken, clasped her hands imploringly and sank, exhausted, at his feet.

Fra Giacomo turned to the door, made the sign of the cross over it and said:

"In the name of the Father and the Son, and the Holy Ghost! I adjure you by the blood of the Crucified, perish, perish, begone, accursed one. Our place is holy. Lord, lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil."

"Mother, Mother, have pity on me—I am dying!"

The mother rushed forward once more stretching out her arms to her daughter, but the monk, implacable as death itself, stood between them.

Ginevra sank on the ground and feeling that she was freezing, doubled up her legs, put her arms round her knees, bent her head and decided not to get up or stir until she died. "The dead must not return to the living," she thought, and instantly remembered Antonio. "Surely he wouldn't have turned me out?" She had thought of him before, but shame had restrained her and she did not want to go to him alone at night

being the wife of another. But now that she was dead to the living what did it matter?

The moon had set; snow-covered hills looked pale in the morning sky. Ginevra got up from her mother's doorstep. Finding no refuge with her family, she went to a stranger.

Antonio had been working all night by lamplight in his studio near Ponte Vecchio at a wax effigy of Ginevra. He did not notice the flight of hours and the cold blue light of a winter's morning appearing in the round window panes. The sculptor's favourite pupil, Bartolino, a fair youth of seventeen, pretty as a girl, was helping him.

Antonio's face was calm. He fancied he was raising the dead and bestowing upon her a new immortal life. The lowered eyelids seemed ready to stir and to open wide, the bosom seemed to heave and warm blood to throb in the fine veins on the temples. He had finished his work and was trying to put an innocent smile on Ginevra's lips when there was a gentle tap at the door.

"Open the door, Bartolino," said Antonio, going on with his work.

The boy went to the door and asked:

"Who is there?"

"It is I, Ginevra Almieri," said a hardly audible voice that sounded like the rustle of night wind.

Bartolino jumped back into the furthest corner of the room, pale and trembling.

"A ghost," he whispered, crossing himself.

But Antonio recognised his sweetheart's voice, and rushing to Bartolino snatched the key out of his hands.

"Messer Antonio, think what you are doing!" muttered the boy, his teeth chattering with fear. Antonio ran to the door, opened it and saw Ginevra who had sunk on the doorstep almost lifeless; the winding sheet gleamed white in the morning radiance and there was hoar frost on her hair.

He was not afraid because his heart was full of profound pity.

He bent over her with words of love, lifted

her and carried her in his arms into his house.

He put her down on the cushions, covering them with the best rug he possessed, sent Bartolino to fetch his landlady, an old woman from whom he hired the studio, made a fire on the hearth, warmed some wine and held the cup while Ginevra drank. She breathed more easily, and though she still could not speak, she opened her eyes. Antonio's heart was filled with joy.

"We shan't be long," he repeated, bustling about the room in a flurry, "the landlady will be here in a minute and then we'll arrange it all . . . only you must excuse me, Madonna Ginevra, my place is in such disorder. . . ."

Blushing with shame for the way he kept house, he lowered the basket on the pulley and to make matters worse it squeaked and rattled. Antonio took some money out of it and giving it to Bartolino told him to run to the market and buy some meat, bread, and vegetables for lunch, and when the landlady came he ordered some hot chicken broth with as much gravity

and earnestness as though his own life depended upon it.

Bartolino rushed headlong to the market, the old woman went to kill the hen. Antonio was left alone with Ginevra.

She called him and as he knelt beside her she told him all that had happened.

"Oh, my dearest," said Ginevra, when she had finished her story, "you alone were not afraid when I came to you dead, you alone love me."

"Would you like me to call your relatives—your uncle, your mother, or your husband?" Antonio asked.

"I have no relatives, neither husband, nor uncle, nor mother. All but you are strangers, since for them I am dead, and for you I am living, and to you alone I belong by right."

The first rays of the sun shone warmly in the windows. Ginevra smiled at him, and as the sunshine grew brighter the rosy hue of life came back to her cheeks and warm blood stirred in the fine veins in her temples. When Antonio

bent down and putting his arms round her, kissed her on the mouth she felt as though the sun were raising her from the dead and giving her a new, immortal life.

"Antonio," said Ginevra, "blessed be death that has taught us to love, blessed be love that is stronger than death!"

THE SCIENCE OF LOVE

MESSER FABRIZIO, one of the most learned professors at the Bologna University, lectured on dialectics, in which he was so wonderfully skilled that he had been nicknamed "the King of Syllogisms." And, indeed, Messer Fabrizio had at his fingertips not only dialectics but the whole of human knowledge, the *trivium* and the *quadrivium*. The most remarkable thing was that the learned man displayed his erudition not merely on important occasions but in the most trivial circumstances of everyday life. His students told the story of how once when he had to address a letter to a dispensary called "The Moon" in Vine square in Padua he wrote in a fit of absent-mindedness: *nella citta Antenorea, in sul foro di Bacco, all 'aromataria della Dea triforme*, that is to the city of Antenora, in the forum of Bacchus, to the drug store of the three-formed goddess. He spoke so much and so beautifully in the lan-

guage of Cicero that he had partly forgotten his mother-tongue; he did not regret this, for he found his native Italian beneath his dignity and said when he was in a bad temper that at the present age of true Ciceronian eloquence Dante's *Divina Commedia* was only fit for wrapping up sausages. When Messer Fabrizio explained whether the word *consumptum* should be spelt with or without *p*, such depths of learning opened before his listeners that the most thoughtless and ignorant of them felt a tremor of awe.

Messer Fabrizio was small, weak and puny; his body was exhausted by continual and excessive study, but he had a stern and imposing countenance. His thick eyebrows frowned with an air of profundity; he walked slowly and majestically, and no one could wear with greater dignity the red professional gown lined with hare-skin and the huge hat that looked like the delicious jam tart which housewives bake for their children on St. John's eve.

Two rich young noblemen from Rome, belonging to the Savelli family, were at that time at

the Bologna University, studying, one of them, civil, and the other, canonical law. They were great friends; one was called Bucciolo, the other Pietro Paolo. Everyone knows that canonical law is not so big a subject as civil law, and so Bucciolo who was studying the former finished his course sooner than Pietro Paolo. Having obtained his degree he decided to go home and said to his friend:

"Dear Pietro, I have received my licentiate and am thinking of going home."

Pietro replied:

"Do not leave me alone in this strange land, I beg you. Spend the winter here. By the spring I shall have finished and we can go home together. And meanwhile, not to waste your time, choose some subject that you like and study it."

Bucciolo agreed and promised to wait for his friend. He went to his professor, Messer Fabrizio, and spoke as follows:

"I have decided to wait for my cousin and I beg you, Maestro, to teach me meanwhile some other beautiful subject."

"Very well," the master answered, "choose any subject you like, and I will teach you with pleasure."

Then Bucciolo said:

"Maestro, if you would kindly consent to it, I should like to study the science of love."

Hearing such a request, Messer Fabrizio frowned and was about to scold the impudent boy so that he should never again be tempted to joke with his masters, but, looking at Bucciolo, he saw such a gentle and rosy face, such a trustful and simple-hearted expression that the Latin words of abuse died down on his lips, he recalled something long past, merry and pleasant that had no connection with the syllogisms and the grammar of Priscian and Donatus. He smiled, too, and said to his pupil:

"Very well. You couldn't have chosen a science that would please me more. You must go next Sunday to the church of the Minorites when women from the whole city come there to matins and see whether you can find one you like. If you do you must follow her from a distance and

discover where she lives—then come back to me. This is your first lesson, you must carry it out exactly."

Bucciolo did as his master told him. He went to church and carefully examined the faces of the women crowded there. He liked best of all a certain lady who had a tender and roguish charm. When she left the church Bucciolo followed her and noticed the house where she lived —from which the lady concluded that he intended to make love to her.

Then he returned to the professor and said:

"I have carried out my first lesson, and found a lady I like." Messer Fabrizio was highly amused at it all, for he was secretly laughing at the simple-hearted Bucciolo and the science he wanted to learn.

With a profound and important air he said to him:

"Now you must walk past her windows two or three times a day, behaving quietly and modestly. You must look at her so that no one else may notice it and only the lady herself can un-

derstand that you are in love with her. Then come back to me. This is your second lesson."

Bucciolo took leave of his master, went into the street where his lady-love lived and walked up and down in front of her house, observing a due measure of caution and yet letting her see that he was there on her account. She noticed him. Bucciolo made a courteous bow, and she returned it—which led him to conclude that she was favourably disposed to him. He went at once to his master and told him about it. Messer Fabrizio listened to him and said:

"Excellent. I am very pleased with you. So far everything is going smoothly. Now you must send to her one of the pedlar-women who sell lace, purses, ribbons and such-like fashionable goods. Send by her a message to your lady saying that you are ready to do anything for her, that you love her more than anyone in the world and intend to be henceforth her faithful servant. Wait for an answer and then come back to me. I'll teach you what to do next."

Losing no time Bucciolo went and found an

obliging old woman, highly experienced in such matters and said to her:

"Will you do something for me? I will pay you well."

The pedlar-woman answered:

"I will do anything you like, for I am an honest woman and have to earn my living."

Then Bucciolo gave her two florins and said:

"I beg you go to Mascarella Street where a young woman I am in love with is living; her name is Madonna Giovanna. Tell her that I am her faithful servant and am ready to do anything for her. Say it all as tenderly and persuasively as you can."

The old woman answered:

"I know, I know. With the help of our Lord and the most Holy Virgin Mary we shall manage this little affair to your satisfaction, so that you will come to me again. The chief thing is to choose the right moment and that you must leave to me."

"Go then," said Bucciolo, "and I'll wait here."

The pedlar-woman went with the basket of

her goods into Mascarella Street and, seeing Madonna Giovanna sitting at the door, greeted her and said:

"Perhaps you would like some of my goods. Take anything you please."

The old woman sat down beside her and began showing her ribbons, muslin, purses, belts, scissors, mirrors and such-like things. Giovanna examined them carefully; at last she picked out a purse and said:

"If I had the money I should love to buy this purse."

The old woman replied:

"Don't you worry about that, madonna. I tell you take anything you like. I have been paid for it already."

The lady was surprised at the old woman's amiability and asked:

"What do you mean, my good woman? How am I to take your words?"

Then the pedlar-woman began in a low voice:

"I'll explain it all to you, madonna. A young man called Bucciolo has sent me to you. He

loves you and is devoted to you with all his heart. He says 'there isn't a task hard enough that I wouldn't gladly undertake to win my lady's love. I would regard it as the greatest favour the Lord God could show me if she were to make some request of me.' And as he said it he dissolved in tears; he is simply wasting with love for you. May the Queen of Heaven refuse my deathbed prayer, may I be struck dead on the spot if I have told you an untruth or seen a nobler and handsomer youth in my life!"

Giovanna flushed crimson when she heard this. "If it weren't for my modesty I would answer you as you deserve, you old hag! How dare you come with such an offer to a respectable woman! May the Lord punish you!"

And with these words she pulled out the wooden bolt that served to fasten the door and raised it to strike the pedlar.

The old woman seized her goods and ran away, but she did not feel safe until she had returned to Bucciolo.

"Well, how are things going?" he asked when he saw her.

"Badly, my dear, so badly that they could not be worse. I've never been put to such shame in my life. If I hadn't made haste and run away my old bones would have tasted the stick. I don't know about you, Messer Bucciolo, but as for me I shall certainly not go to her again at any price, and I don't advise you to either."

Bucciolo was very much grieved and immediately went to tell his master all that had happened.

Messer Fabrizio comforted him and said:

"Don't distress yourself, Bucciolo. No tree is felled at one blow. Walk past her windows once more and we shall see what face she will make at you. Then come back to me again."

Bucciolo made ready and went to his lady-love's house. As soon as she saw him she called her servant and said:

"Go after this young man you see there, Uliva, and tell him I want him to come to me to-night for certain."

Uliva came up to him and said:

"Messer, Madonna Giovanna asks you very much to come to her to-night, for she wishes to speak to you."

Bucciolo did not know what to think, but he answered:

"Very well, tell your mistress that I will come gladly." Then he hastened back to Messer Fabrizio. The professor, too, was surprised and asked:

"In what street does your lady live?"

"In Mascarella Street."

"And what is the servant's name?"

"I don't know. She is tall, thin and dark and is lame in the left foot."

"By Hercules—it's Uliva!" the professor muttered to himself, turning as red as a lobster.

"What were you going to say, Maestro?" Bucciolo asked.

Messer Fabrizio felt as though the floor were slipping from under his feet, and seemed to see double as he looked at Bucciolo's face. He had not the strength to face the final blow and could

not bring himself to ask what the lady was called, for fear Bucciolo would name Madonna Giovanna, his wife. During the winter months the professor slept at the University so as to be able to lecture at night as well as during the day, and Madonna Giovanna was left in the house alone with the servant.

"Will you keep the tryst, Bucciolo?"

"Of course."

"Please come and tell me when you are ready to go."

"Certainly," said Bucciolo as he walked away. The professor concluded from his words and expression that he suspected nothing.

"I don't want him to learn the science at my expense," Messer Fabrizio thought.

Bucciolo called in the evening.

"Maestro, it is time for me to go."

"Go, and be careful."

"Oh, you may be sure of that."

He was wearing a thick cuirass and had a sharp sword under his arm and a long dagger in his belt—in short he had taken every precau-

tion. When he went out, Messer Fabrizio followed him quietly, unnoticed by him. Bucciolo walked to his lady's door, and she opened it and let him in the moment he knocked. Having seen with his own eyes that Bucciolo's sweetheart was Madonna Giovanna, his wife, the professor flew into a terrible rage.

"By Minerva, there is not the slightest doubt now that he is learning at my expense!"

Messer Fabrizio ran back to the University and taking a sword and a dagger returned to Mascarella Street, intending to catch Bucciolo unawares. Coming up to the door of his house he knocked. Madonna Giovanna was sitting by the fire with her lover; when she heard the knocking she guessed it was her husband and taking Bucciolo by the hand led him into the next room and hid him under a heap of wet clothes that lay under the table by the window. Then she ran to the door and asked:

"Who is there?"

The professor shouted:

"Open, open quick, you wretch!"

Giovanna opened the door and seeing her husband cried out:

"Goodness me, what's the meaning of this, Messer Fabrizio?" He went on shouting furiously, louder than ever:

"By Apollo, I know who is in my house!"

"Oh, luckless me!" cried Giovanna "what are you saying? Are you in your right mind? Search the whole house and if you find anyone I am ready to be quartered! Much use it is being a faithful wife! Ask our neighbours, they can tell you something about my virtue and modesty. Not long ago an old woman came here . . . But what's the good of talking? . . . If you think you saw something you had better make the sign of the cross and say a prayer to save yourself from the lure of the evil one who seeks to ruin your soul."

The professor told her to light a candle and began searching among the barrels in the cellar and then in the rooms; he looked under the bed and pierced the straw mattress in a few places; in short, he peeped into every mouse hole but

failed to find Bucciolo. Madonna Giovanna followed him about with a candle in her hand, saying:

"Dear Maestro, come to your senses, make the sign of the cross, for now I see clearly that the common enemy is tempting you and that you have fancied something too shameful to say. Let me tell you that if a single hair of my head hankered after anything of the kind I would put an end to myself. I adjure you in the name of God, don't let the evil one beguile you!"

Failing to find Bucciolo and hearing his wife's endless protestations Messer Fabrizio ended by almost believing her; he blew out the candle and went back to the University.

Madonna Giovanna instantly bolted the door and pulled out her lover from under the clothes. Making a bright fire in the hearth she roasted a suckling pig and brought several kinds of wine from the cellar. They ate, drank, and made merry and spent the night in mutual caresses. When morning came Bucciolo said:

"Madonna, I must take leave of you, have you any commands to give me?"

"Oh yes," she said, throwing her arms round him and kissing him tenderly. "I command you to come to me to-night."

Bucciolo promised, and returning to the University said to his master:

"I have something amusing to tell you."

"Very well, I am listening."

"Last night," said Bucciolo, "when I was in my lady-love's house her husband arrived suddenly; he searched all over the house and found nothing. She had hidden me under a heap of wet clothes and deceived him so cleverly that the foolish man believed her and went away. She and I were left alone, we had a suckling pig for supper and tasted many kinds of excellent wine, and I may assure you, Maestro, we had a delightful time. I think this science of love is the best and most amusing of all sciences and to my mind no other is to be compared with it. I don't know how to thank you, dear Master! And now with your permission I will go and rest for I

haven't had much sleep last night and have promised to come to her again this evening."

Messer Fabrizio said:

"Come and tell me when you are ready to go."

"With pleasure," answered Bucciolo, and went to have a sleep. The professor was beside himself with fury; he tried to lecture but instead of syllogisms he made up such nonsense that he hastened to leave the room saying he was ill. His heart was consumed with jealousy and he kept thinking all day of how he would catch Bucciolo and punish him. He hired a rusty breastplate and an antediluvian helmet from an old *landsknecht* who kept an armour shop in the next street. In the evening the unsuspecting Bucciolo came to Messer Fabrizio and said:

"I am going."

"Go along, and don't forget to come and tell me in the morning what has happened to you," the professor replied.

"Certainly," Bucciolo assured him and set off to his lady. Messer Fabrizio instantly put on his breastplate and vizor and followed him closely

intending to seize him at the door of the house. But Giovanna had been expecting her lover and let him in at once and shut the door after him. The professor came immediately and made a fearful uproar. Then Giovanna blew out the candle and stood in front of her lover, screening him from her husband; she opened the door and throwing one arm round her husband's neck, with the other she pushed Bucciolo out of the door so quickly and cleverly that the husband had noticed nothing,—and then she screamed:

"Help, help! The Maestro has gone mad!"

She held him tight in her embrace. Bucciolo had not recognized Fabrizio for he could not see his face hidden by the vizor. The neighbours ran up attracted by the noise and when they saw the professor in such unusual attire and heard his wife shouting, "hold him, hold him, he has gone mad with too much learning," they believed her and decided that Messer Fabrizio was not in his right mind. They said to him compassionately:

"Oh, poor Maestro, whatever has happened to

you? You had better make haste and go to bed. Have a proper rest, and mind you don't overwork in the future! We are plain people, but we wish you well; do take our advice and calm yourself, Maestro."

"How can I," Messer Fabrizio roared, "when I have seen with my own eyes that this worthless woman has let her lover into the house?"

"Lover!" Madonna Giovanna cried. "Luckless me! Ask these good people if they have ever known me to wrong you in any way!" Then all the men and women answered in one voice: "Maestro, don't you believe any such nonsense —there isn't a woman in the world more modest and virtuous than your wife. We know that sure enough."

"You know nothing," the professor shouted, "I tell you, I have seen the lover with my own eyes and he is now in my house!"

At that moment Madonna Giovanna's two brothers came up. Seeing them she wept more bitterly than ever and said:

"My dear brothers, my husband has gone out

of his mind and wants to kill me. He says I have let a lover into the house. What do you think of that? You know I am not that sort of woman and I haven't been brought up to endure such insults."

Then her brothers said:

"We wonder you dare say such things of our sister! You have lived with her happily for years. What has possessed you to-day? Why are you in such a fury?"

"I have seen her lover," Messer Fabrizio repeated, "I have seen him with my own eyes."

"Very well," the brothers replied, "let us look for him, and if we find him we'll punish her to your satisfaction."

One of them called Giovanna aside and asked:

"Tell me the truth. Is there a man in the house?"

"What are you saying?" she cried. "You should be ashamed to ask me. God spare me from such a disgrace! I would rather die a thousand times than think of doing such a thing."

These words completely reassured her brothers, and they began searching the house with Messer Fabrizio. The Maestro saw a heap of freshly washed clothes, rushed at it and pierced it furiously through and through with his sword thinking that Bucciolo was hidden there.

"There, you see," cried Giovanna, clasping her hands, "haven't I told you he was out of his mind! Isn't it madness to spoil his own property that has not done him any harm?"

The brothers searched the whole house, found nothing and were persuaded that the professor had really gone out of his mind.

One of them said:

"He is mad."

The other added:

"Dear Maestro, you must admit it was very wrong to call our sister a bad woman."

Hearing this the professor flew into a frenzy, for he could not doubt what he had seen with his own eyes. He began abusing them violently, brandishing a sword. Then they fell upon him, disarmed him, and binding him hand and foot

left him so for the night while they and Giovanna went to bed. In the morning they called in a physician; he prescribed a mixture, ordered cold compresses to be put on the invalid's head and bled him. He suggested that no one should speak to Fabrizio or answer his questions and that he should be put on a strict diet till he was better. All these directions were carefully carried out.

A sad rumour spread through Bologna that Messer Fabrizio, the famous doctor of dialectics, "The King of Syllogisms," had gone mad. Everyone was concerned about him. The students said among themselves:

"I noticed yesterday that the Maestro did not seem quite himself. You remember he could not finish his lecture and his face looked rather strange."

Many rejoiced in secret.

"This is what too much learning leads to! The evil one is ready to snap one up any moment."

The students decided to visit the sick professor. Knowing nothing of what had happened Bucciolo came to the University to tell Messer

Fabrizio of his new adventures, but heard that the professor had gone mad. Surprised and grieved, he set off with the other students to see the invalid. When he saw where they were going and into whose house, his perplexity and horror knew no bounds; he very nearly fainted when he understood it all. But from fear lest someone might notice his confusion he went into the house together with his comrades and saw Messer Fabrizio in bed, looking pale and worn, bound hand and foot, with cold compresses on his head. The students went up to the professor in turn expressing their sympathy and concern. When it was Bucciolo's turn he came up to Messer Fabrizio and said:

"Dear Master, I love and respect you as a father and so if there is anything I can do to please you, tell me as you would your own son."

Seeing his heartfelt repentance the professor said good-naturedly:

"Go in peace, Bucciolo! You have learned enough at my expense, though to tell the truth you have taught me also a thing or two."

Madonna Giovanna added hastily:

"Don't take any notice of his words, he is raving."

Bucciolo hurried away, found Pietro Paolo and said to him:

"Brother, good luck to you. I have learned here so much that I have lost all desire to study any more."

With these words he left his friend, and immediately setting out on the journey safely arrived in Rome.

THE END